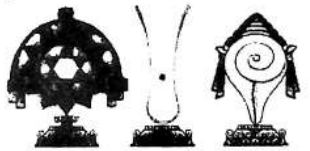
SANTADAS KATHAMRITA

Edited by Sri Gangadevi, Panchatirtha

English Translation

Debiprasad Bhattacharya



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Kathia Baba Ashram, Sukchar

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FORWARD

Swami Santa Das Kathiababaji Maharaj would dispense invaluable advice about various aspects of life to his disciples during casual conversations. Some of those questions were quite universal in nature. Those questions and the answers that Swami Santa Das Kathiababaji Maharaj provided to them were collected in a work called 'Santa Das Kathamrita'. Late Deviprasad Bhattacharya took the effort to translate this work in English so that it can reach a broader audience beyond Bengal. We are indebted to him for that. Our sincere thanks to Sri Rathin Bhattacharya, son of Late Deviprasad Bhattacharya, who was kind enough to provide us the opportunity to publish this book. Mr. Pinaki Datta worked really hard to get this book published. I pray to God that he showers Pinaki with his blessings.

We hope that this book will provide valuable answers and insights to life's many questions and will benefit those who read it. Swani Santa Das KathiababaJi's blessings will be showered on the readers of this book.

Dr. Brindaban Bihari Das (Mahanta)

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SANTADAS KATHAMRITA

Let me tell you what I have realized in my own life about the Truths revealed by the great ṛṣis of old: On the roads, in the fields, everywhere in the world around us, in all conditions it is He who exists. You should therefore treat all with respect and serve all.

The sādhana you have received is not an ordinary one. You have at the back of you all the power (śakti) of the great ṛṣis – believe it to be wholly true. You should never do anything that may transgress the glory of this exalted tradition that has come down to you from the ṛṣis.

Guru and the Divine are one. You must regard them as identical; this is what makes the real well-being. I have done little; only Thakurji is displaying various līlās through this body. His grace is not bound by any hard and fast rules. Some are not getting much even by great effort, some others, on the other hand, suddenly receive a great deal. All are His līlā.

Listen. Once, Babaji Maharaj (my Guru) related to me the story of a bhakta. He called me one day and said: Come, I shall tell you something. Then he told me the story which runs as follows: "There was once a bhakta named Nona Bhagat, an extremely simple and good-natured person. Noticing that the village priest worships Thakurji (the divine image), he came to have a great wish to do the same. He pressingly entreated the priest saying – give me a Thakur, I shall worship Him. The priest thought – "Here is an ignorant fool; fancy him worshipping God! But Nona was so insistent, so pressing in his entreaty that the priest could not but do something. So he gave Nona a pestle and said to him, 'look, here is your Thakur, you will worship this'. Filled with great joy Nona returned home with his Thakur. His wife, seeing his Thakur rolled with laughter; it was a laughter filled with mockery and derision. Nona, however, was totally oblivious of all these. He earnestly devoted himself to worship of Thakurji. After offering bhoga to his Thakur he piteously appealed to his Thakur to eat it. It was his firm belief that Thakurji actually accepts bhoga and partakes of it; isn't it for this reason that bhoga is offered to Him? Hence, the more his Thakur delays in eating the bhoga the more insistent became his entreaty. "Thakur please eat – the day is passing; you must eat, why won't you eat?" – Piteously, desperately,

frantically he kept repeating his words. Through astonishingly simple faith and earnest insistence he, at last, had a vision of Thakurji. Thakur actually ate the bhoga. Later, when he met the priest, the latter asked him, in a tone of amusement: "Hello! How is your worship going on?" Nona, prostrating before him with great reverence replied: "my worship is going on very well; ah! What a lovely Thakur you gave me! He made some trouble at first but that is nothing. At the beginning Thakur stubbornly refused to eat bhoga; He made a big fuss about it. Nevertheless, at the end He did eat it and created no further trouble afterwards." "What! You say, He has eaten the bhoga?" "Yes, He has." "How is it? But He never eats bhoga from me." "How is it? But He has eaten bhoga from me. He did make some trouble, but that was only at the beginning." "Can you show me your Thakur eating bhoga from you?" "Yes, I can, certainly." The following day the priest went to Nona's place of worship at the time of bhoga. Thakur ate the bhoga; Nona saw it but the priest didn't; he only heard the tinkling sound of His anklets. Exceedingly surprised, seized with remorse for having treated Nona with such scorn and derision, he took leave of Nona. Meanwhile, Nona felt a little pride in his mind. He thought – the priest, after worshipping Thakurji for so long hasn't had a vision of Him and yet, I had it in one day. Thakur, who is a lover of bhaktas, to crush his ego, took him to a jungle. It was a desolate place situated upon a hill and surrounded by a forest. He then showed Nona the relics of many fire places (dhuni) and said, "You see – I have not appeared before you so easily, after all. You have not, it is true, done much for Me in this birth; but see, how in your previous births you had lighted so many fire places while practicing tapasyā (penance) in order to have a vision of Me. These are the signs of your sādhana in previous births. At this Nona's ahaṃkāra (ego) was crushed.

"You see now, how the priest even after worshipping his Thakurji failed to obtain His Grace, whereas Nona had it suddenly. His Grace follows no hard and fast rule". Some among the bhaktas remarked, "But then, Thakurji showed him how much he had done in the way of tapasyā in his previous births."

Maharajji: Yes, that's true indeed.

Chapter - 2

Q: Maharaj! What is the aim of human life?

A: (With a smile) the aim of man is bhoga (enjoyment) and mokṣa (liberation). Choosing one or the other of these two ideals, every human being traverses the path of life; some aim at bhoga; some desire mokṣa.

The enjoyment of objects of pleasure (viṣaya) takes place even among sub-human species; it is solely for the purpose of striving for self-realization that one obtains a human body. This is precisely why the human body is distinguished from all other bodies. If, even after being born as a human being, one does not attain the knowledge of Self (Ātman), then what is the difference between a human being and an animal? Hence, every man should make an earnest effort with a firm determination to attain self-realization.

Believe me – there is, in every one of you, infinite power; you are capable of doing whatever you have a desire for. With constant and unremitting effort your desire will become strong and firm, Divine Grace will descend on you; your life as a human being will be fulfilled and blessed.

Q: What does the phrase "attainment of mokṣa" mean?

A: Remaining permanently in cidānanda (Consciousness-Bliss) is the essential nature of every jīva. Attaining this state is what is called "mukti" or "mokṣa". What we usually call ānanda is subject to growth and decay. The ānanda one enjoys while remaining in one's svarūpa (one's essential nature – Ātman) is impossible to express in words; so this too – this supremely blessed state – is designated by the same word – "ānanda". It is not expressible or verbally communicable; it is not even comprehensible by the intellect. That ānanda has no fall or diminution. Even after merging in the ocean of Bliss the jīvātman is not annihilated. His separate nāma (name) and rūpa (form) no doubt cease to exist but He Himself endures. This (state) is what is known as "nirvāṇa" or "mokṣa".

Q: (One of the listeners): Maharaj! Isn't the effort to attain mokṣa a kind of selfishness?

A: No, it isn't. My sons, regarding this matter you have no conception at all. The attainment of mokṣa means – to merge, to surrender, to immolate oneself at the feet of Brahman and

therefore at the feet of all. How do you call this selfishness? Selfishness is present only where there is craving for enjoyment (bhoga). Not even the slightest trace of what you understand by selfishness can exist in the life of one who aspires after mokṣa.

Q: Isn't it better to dedicate oneself to the service of the country than to strive for individual salvation in this way?

A: It is very good to serve one's country. For this one has to dedicate oneself to a larger interest by renouncing smaller ones. It certainly helps spiritual progress. Nevertheless, the service of one's country is sakāma karma, an act prompted by desire for the fruit. However, through this one will certainly go to heaven (svarga), and enjoy great happiness and pleasure; attainment of mokṣa will not, cannot take place. A man pursues his self-interest along with his family, his wife and children and so on; service for one's country is only the pursuits of self-interest in a wider sphere; it cannot lead to the attainment of mokṣa. In the case of pursuit of one's self-interest within the family sphere it is said: "I shall bring about the well-being of my family, by hook or crook." In the other case you say: "I must bring about the progress of my country, by whatever means." Both are sakāma karma", as I have said. In the one case, the sphere of one's activities is relatively small; in the other, it is relatively large – this is the only difference. If this is so, how can one attain liberation (mokṣa) through this. The spiritual endeavour (mokṣa-sādhana) – this is an entirely different matter, my son.

Hearing these words one of the listeners who happened to be a profound admirer of Swami Vivekānanda, feeling somewhat uneasy, asked: "Maharaj! Without harbouring any ill-will towards the British, cherishing, on the contrary, charitable feelings towards them, without feeling hostile towards England or any other country, entertaining rather friendly feelings towards them if one serves one's country for the love of God and in a spirit of service to Him – will it not promote the attainment of God or mokṣa?"

Greatly pleased at this question Santadasji Maharaj replied: "Yes, my son, why shouldn't it be so? It is the feeling, the attitude, that is all. If one, through serving one's family – one's wife and children and others – in the spirit of service to God only for His pleasure can attain God, then, if one serves one's country in the same spirit (of service to God) why shouldn't he attain mokṣa or realize God? You all know that we worship an image because we believe that God dwells in it. If

God can be present in the image then why shouldn't He be present in you, in your wife, in the society you live in and your own country? And, if He is present within all these, then, thinking that "I am serving Him" if one serves all these entities only to please God, why shouldn't he, as a result of this service, attain God? You see, my son, it is the feeling, the spirit, that matters.

Q: Bhaktas, it is said, do not want "nirvāṇa-mukti"; what does it mean?

A: It means – they regard the whole world as the playground, the pleasure-garden of God, and so see God in all. Hence, they serve all, enjoying divine bliss in all conditions. Wherever they are, whatever the condition in which they find themselves, they feel contented; they have nothing to ask for. Nevertheless, though they do not ask for anything, God gives them nirvāṇa-mukti (final release from all bondage) that final goal of Man.

Q: So it is not that the bhaktas do not desire nirvāṇa-mukti because it is something small or trivial ?

A: (Shocked) Ram Ram!

A bhakta: But there are some people who say like this.

A: No matter what they say, we have no grudge against them; let them say what they like. But remember, nirvāṇa-mukti is the last word – that supreme immutable state where there is no coming or going. Only, the bhaktas do not beg for it saying, "dehi, dehi" (give me, give me); knowing that the Divine is present everywhere, in all places and at all the time, they remain all the time in a state of joy; they have nothing in particular to ask for.

Q: What is it that constitutes bondage (bandha) and what mukti?

A: What is it that binds us, confines us? The answer is desire – desire for "bhoga" (enjoyments). "I want a wife, a son, a house" and so on. It is these desires that drag you behind. It is this attachment to objects for enjoyment (viṣaya) is what constitutes bondage. If you have attachment to anything, wherever you may go, it will pull you, drag you behind. Where your son is, or your wife – thoughts such as these distract your mind; they don't allow you a moment's relief. I am now in this room, for instance; if it breaks down, I don't feel any pain. But if this room belonged to me I would have felt pain if it were damaged. This is what is called "bandhana".

When attachment goes even if I remain in this room there will be no bandhana. When this happens to one, he goes up, he gets across this ocean of saṃsāra. This is bandhana of the grosser kind. But this is not all; there are other kinds of bondage of a subtler kind. When these go, then and then alone comes "uddhāra" (deliverance) or mokṣa.

What men seek in the world (saṃsāra) is ānanda. Whatever men do, they do it in the hope of some gain, either immediate or in future. When the gain is once achieved it can no longer cause much pleasure or happiness. He tastes it, licks it up, so to speak, and finds at last that there is nothing in it. Until you have attained real ānanda (bliss), you have no real happiness. Until men are established in abiding bliss they suffer from restlessness, always thinking - "where shall I get it? where?" The jīva has emerged from the Ocean of Bliss. Until he returns to the Ocean of Bliss (his ultimate source) he grips now this, now that. Being eternally established in cidānanda – that is the essential nature of jīva; to attain that state – that is what is called mukti. When, after the severing of all bonds the mind will become clear and pure, then it will be joy eternal. In that state there is not a slightest trace of suffering or pain.

Q: When one prays to God or practices japa will He annul His karma-phala (fruits of action)? Does making an appeal to Him bear any fruit?

A: Invoking God never goes in vain. If, by calling on Him one can feel one with Him, God will annul his karma-phala. Invocation to God is certainly fruitful. Hundreds, thousands of sādhakas of all times and countries testify to this. They solemnly testify that they have seen God. You haven't made such strenuous efforts as they did; how can you say then that what they have said is not true?

The fruit of karma is indeed to be borne; but who is the giver of these fruits? Who makes the assessment? There is a Governer of this universe; He is not subject to karma.

The general rule is: As one sows so he reaps. When one calls on Him with intense earnestness and thus loses all sense of separate identity, one does not have to endure the consequences of one's actions (karma-phala). The body persists on account of karma. Karma can, as a matter of fact, alter. But this does not happen unless one's devotion is intense and earnest. God is not

subject to karma; it is karma that is fully under His control. The laws of karma are His laws, He does not violate them easily.

Q: As karma-phala must be endured, what is the use of calling on God?

A: He is immobile and inert, and yet, He is the agent of all actions, all movements in the universe. He from whom the creation, preservation (sustenance) and dissolution of the entire Cosmos proceed, is certainly engaged in karma. How can then can He be characterized as inactive? At the same time it must be understood that He is also inert, devoid of all activities.

"sarvarūpī arūpī tvam" – All Forms are Your Forms and yet You are devoid of Forms – there is no contradiction in this. He is in all manifested Forms and yet, He is beyond All. His Being is not exhausted by all these (Forms). Water vapour, which you cannot see becomes, when condensed, water; when water, in its turn is condensed, is turned into ice. This ice is nothing but water vapour.

Q:. Between śreyas (good) and preyas (pleasure) which is to be embraced by us?

A: Śreyas and preyas, the two in this world are not the same. Our mind desire, in most cases, the preyas, not the śreyas. But though a man wants the preyas, he seldom gets what is actually pleasant. What is pleasant today, may become unpleasant tomorrow. He who, feeling that living in the midst of society is unpleasant, so, hankers after living in solitude will cease to find such a life pleasant within a few days and become eager to live in society again. It is the same regarding all matters of this world. What is pleasant today becomes unpleasant tomorrow and what is unpleasant now becomes pleasant again later. It is only he to whom what is good appears to be also pleasant, can attain real peace.

Q: What is sin and what is merit? Does death put an end to all karma? Does all karma come to an end with Brahmajñāna?

A: Whatever karma the jīva does in this life, pāpa (sin) as well as puṇya, is of two kinds. There are such extremely virtuous deeds which lead to the attainment of a degree of happiness which a human body cannot sustain. For the enjoyment of happiness caused by those exceedingly virtuous deeds they obtain a divine body in which they go to the heavenly worlds

where they experience the blessed fruits of their karmas. There are, again, virtuous deeds the fruits of which can be enjoyed by the human body alone. It is to enjoy the fruits of those karmas that one has to be born here (as a human being). Those who have done karma of both kinds – pāpa as well as puṇya – enjoy the fruits of most virtuous act in heaven; then, to undergo the fruits of the remaining karma they are born in this world. Sinful acts too are of two kinds. The suffering and pain that a jīva has to endure as a consequence of sinful acts of an extremely heinous kind are such that human body is incapable of withstanding it. Obtaining a body fit to undergo the fruits of such (sinful) acts, he suffers agony in hell. Through the sufferings of such agony these heinous sins are worked out. In order to endure the sufferings and pain whose consequences are capable of being undergone by human (and similar) bodies, he has to be born again in this world. The fruits of karma a jīva does while alive, are experienced by him – the same jīva – after death. These karmas are usually exhausted by bhoga alone. Karmas other than "prārabdha karma" are exhausted, destroyed with the rise of Brahmajñāna. As a rule, karma does not drop off without bearing fruit.

Q: It is God who makes a man commit sins and also punishes him for this. Why is this so?

A: The general rule is: as a consequence of sin suffering will be caused. If a man, knowing this, commits sinful acts, then, as a result of this he will have to suffer. But this has got nothing to do with God sending punishment. It is not that, in consequence of the commission of a sinful act God flies into a rage and punishes the sinner in a fit of anger. By undergoing suffering sin is worked out; this helps to bring about self-purification (citta-śuddhi). The sole purpose of suffering is purification of the mind; hence, this suffering is the cause of endless (spiritual) well-being. When a person is beheaded with a sword the blood, fat and so on of the victim stick to the sword; the hands of the killer remain untouched by these. It is the sword that has to be cleansed by rubbing and rinsing with water. Similarly, that particular limb (the particular jīva) by which God causes an evil deed to be committed is tainted by that act. This evil act – if you call it evil at all – He causes to be performed by him (the evil doer) only for the well-being of the world. Then, as for the tainted limb of His (that jīva) God rubs and rinses – what you call inflicting pain and suffering – it and by so doing cleanses it (that particular jīva). If you understand this clearly all doubts will be dispelled. The concept of "punishment or eternal damnation" is wholly absent in the sacred texts of Hinduism.

[Serially given below the questions asked by a Lawyer śiṣya]

Q: God is subject to His own Will; isn't He?

A: It is because you are a lawyer by profession that you are dwelling on the concept of law. But God is not subject to any law in the manner you are suggesting. Whatever He does, is His law.

Q: God has made His jīvas suffer a great deal; isn't it an act of cruelty on His part?

A: It seems to you to be so because you regard the jīva as an entity separate from God. The question has arisen in your mind since you do not know that it is He who has become the jīva, that it is He who, by appearing as Many is playing this fascinatingly diverse game.

Q: He is continuously pushing us towards the scaffold. Only to make us forget this He, sometimes, as it were, offers us fragrant flowers to smell.

Maharajji: You are raising, my son, questions concerning Brahmavidyā, and yet, you don't have the capacity for grasping it. It is because you don't have this power of comprehension that though you have just heard that it is He who has become jīva that it is He, again, who is playing this wonderful game by multiplying Himself, you are still dwelling on His cruelty. To whom will He be cruel? The jīvas we are His own limbs, so to speak, His own integral portions.

(After a pause) Moreover, how can you say that all this play ends in gloom and distress? This is indeed not true, my son. The consummation of all this is ānanda. That everything ends in joylessness and misery is an utterly untenable misconception. Now, even if what you are saying about God leading us all towards the "scaffold" is true, there cannot be, in that case, any question of cruelty. For, you shouldn't forget He is the "scaffold"; that He is the Place of final dissolution of all things; that it is He again who is playing all these games. That He is all the time leading you towards the scaffold for "execution" you yourself don't believe; you are saying this only for the sake of argument.

Q: Let us take the case of a sādhaka who is progressing in his sādhanā. Why does God push back violently causing his fall? What's the need for sending celestial nymphs to a ṛṣi for instance who is practicing tapasyā?

A: By doing this God does not push the sādhaka back; on the contrary, He leads him forward. I have told you already about the thought came to me while proceeding towards Vadarikashrama. Now, on their way to Vadarikashrama, pilgrims have to cross hundreds of hills. When I climb up a high and steep hill I indeed advance towards Vadarikashrama; again when I descend down an incline on the other side of the hill, then too, I make a further advance towards my destination. It is true however that one finds himself in a somewhat dark region when one has gone down the other side, and yet, the sunlit lovely places on the hill-top left behind is not near to Vadrinarayana than the dark caverns in front, below the hill (on the other side). In the same manner, suppose someone after practicing for thousand years has become endowed with supernatural powers; and yet, even after that he still feels the influence of lust in his heart.

It is under the influence of lust that, infatuated by the charm of an apsarā (nymph) he forgets his tapasyā. But though viewed from the outside he suffers a downfall, as a matter of fact he makes progress. After spending sometime with the apsarās his lust is gratified and thus drops off, when he realizes his own mistake. Then, resuming his tapasyā with fresh vigour and renewed zeal he is able to achieve his goal – becomes fulfilled and blessed. What's wrong in this? How do you describe it as a fall, a pushing back? My son, no one can say what causes what.

It is now late in the evening – 10 PM. This dull, unnecessarily prolonged discussion came to an end at last. The readers can hardly realize how dry, insipid the topic of conversation was, for I have only recorded that part of the conversation which was comparatively interesting out of a mass of sheer verbiage. Even the most patient readers would have been bored had the entire conversation been recorded by me. Even this Mahātmā seemed to have lost patience towards the end of this dry discussion. So, it was found after everyone took leave of him, one after one, offering their praṇāma, to him that only two persons, one a disciple of his and another from among the assembled listeners remained. Then, turning to the latter he said, in simple word and in a somewhat vexed tone, it seemed to me: "My son! He is my disciple, so I answered every question he asked; it is my duty to resolve even his doubts. But arguments concerning these

questions, arguments for arguments' sake are wholly pointless, even futile. Arguments prompted by a genuine desire to know the truth – that is quite another thing. And as for that "scaffold" and "execution" – he doesn't believe a word of it; he told a lie. For one who has such a tendency towards argument for argument's sake devotion and faith are a far cry; not only that; it blocks the flow of grace; which stops at the end". He said these words in such a manner that the person whom he addressed kept staring at him, deeply moved.

NEW CHAPTER

On the whole Śri Śri Swami Santadasji Maharaj is not keeping well for sometine past; he was suffering from an attack of severe cold. On top of it, for two days past he has been suffering badly from an inflammation in the eye. He is also having light fever. Yesterday, he had been lying in bed throughout the day; he even found it difficult to speak, so, there was hardly any conversation. He is a little better today, it seems. His disciples are having him treated by a doctor, but he doesn't appear to be particularly keen on it. It looks as though he is mechanically following their instructions. When, today, I came and sat down near him, I heard him speak thus – "Bābā (Śri Śri Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj) used to say whatever is to be done by Him alone; only he gets it done by somebody who is a mere occasion or instrument. Nothing happens without His will.

Listen. Once, the son of Dhanvantari (the heavenly physician) fell ill. The best medicine for that particular ailment was prepared by him and after vivifying it by a mantra and turning to it he said, "Cure the ailment of this boy." Folding his hands he (the medicine) said, "Maharaj! To cure this disease is beyond me." Taken aback he thought – "How strange! This is the best medicine for this disease; he can cure this disease and yet says he cannot." But he, after being requested repeatedly kept giving the same reply. As he couldn't expect anything from him he gave him up and prepared another medicine and after vivifying him too by a mantra said to him "Cure the ailment of this boy." But he too said with folded hands, "Maharaj! This is beyond my powers."

Thus after preparing all the best medicines in the same manner - one after another - and vivified them by mantra; but every one of them repeated the same thing: "Curing this disease is beyond my powers." Then, in desperation he prepared a most common medicine and told him, "Look! Can you cure my son of this disease?" he replied, "Maharaj! I will." At this moment all the medicines that were prepared before shouted in a chorus, "I can do this, I can do this." Dhanvantari then remarked, "How is this? When I requested all of you to cure this disease, you all replied, "No, I can't." What does this mean?" at this, all of them replied, "Maharaj! The period of your son's suffering of the disease has now passed. The period of (undergoing) the disease having ended, all of us are able now to cure the disease."

"This, my son, is indeed the truth of the matter. Until the (fated) period of the suffering of the disease ends whatever and how much medicine you give it will have no effect. If, on the other hand, the fated period of suffering comes to an end an ordinary medicine will benefit the patient. Now, the doctor has taken the trouble to come and has prescribed medicines; you are giving me these medicines and I take them; nevertheless, until the period of suffering ends the ailment will not be cured." Among the sādhu disciples of Śri Śri Santadasji Maharaj there was one who was very young, a boy from Vraja; he was very simple and lovingly devoted to his Guru. While thinking deeply about the disease and the resulting pain of his Guru, a question arose in his mind.

Q: Maharaj! The Guru is indeed, even above God, isn't He?

A: It is God Himself Who, assuming the body of the Guru, confer on him His Grace. If the disciple carries out his instructions and obeys his words faithfully, all the torments of the disciple come to an end. That Guru through whose help all the bonds of the disciple are severed, should be looked upon by the latter as very great and exalted – can there be any doubt about this?

Q: What great powers the Guru has! Why then doesn't he get himself cured of his disease?

A: Ah! Why are you so worried about this disease of mine? What of it? Its nothing. How many things of this kind will happen to the body - what of that? Suppose you are living in a rental house; if the rooms of that house are on the point of collapse will it cause you distress, or would you be in a hurry to repair it? The room, after all, doesn't belong to you; the impending

collapse will cause you distress when the room is your own. This body, in the same way, is like a rented room. After all, this body is not you; why should you then be so troubled in mind by the pain and suffering of the body. Mental disturbance comes only when one feels identified with the body. Diseases and so on are nothing but an illusion, my son. While sleeping you see a dream that you are being chased by a tiger and you are fleeing in terror. In reality, neither the tiger has chased you nor have you fled. Just so we do not really have any disease it is only because we are identified with the body that it seems to us that we are suffering from disease. The body has become ill; so what? Illness is not everlasting; sooner or later, it will cease to exist. Like happiness, unhappiness too should be looked upon as a play. That is the real state of mind. Those who are disturbed when their bodies suffer from illness, do not have an advanced (spiritual) state, my son! The body is ill, but I am alright, lying in bed. When I was in the state of a house-holder, whenever I suffered from indisposition, my mind would be filled with joy; I thought with a sense of relief: "No one will come to me to discuss affairs (of this world); I shall practice nāma-japa undisturbed." And this is what I actually used to do.

Listen. There is a story in the Mahābhārata. There were two brothers; both of them were (spiritually) accomplished, but the elder brother was an ascetic (tapasvin) of a very high order. Once the younger brother went to visit his elder brother at the latter's āśrama. As the elder brother was not then at his āśrama, the younger brother could not meet him. He kept waiting. Sitting there for a long time he felt very hungry. There was a mango tree there, with ripe mangoes hanging from the branches. Driven by hunger he plucked a mango from the tree and ate it. Returning to the hermitage the elder brother came to learn this and said – "this mango tree belongs to the king. By eating a mango in this manner you have been guilty of theft. Go to the king right away and ask punishment from him." The younger brother then went to the king to seek punishment. Having learnt all, the king said: "Maharaj! It is nothing, a mere trifle; please go back to your own place." Nevertheless, he was adamant and kept pressing the king for punishment. The king then said, "Maharaj! According to law, the proper punishment for plucking out a mango is to dismember the hand by which you plucked it. That however is not necessary; the guilt that you have incurred you can easily undo by applying the force of your asceticism (tapasyā). At this he, extending his arm said, "No, it will not be so! Chop off this hand. Why should I misuse tapasyā by applying it in a trivial matter. After all, I practiced tapasyā (ascetic

austerities) not to save my hand but to attain self-realization". Thus rendered helpless, the king had his hand chopped off as a punishment. The elder brother was greatly pleased and pointing to a pond said, "Go and have a bath in the pond." As directed by him the younger brother bathed in the pond. Instantly his mutilated hand became whole as before – as if nothing has happened!

So, now you understand my son! How to save one's body, saints and sages never make use of their powers acquired through their tapasyā or sādhanā."

Q: Maharaj! Judging by externals – one's conduct and activities, for instance, is it possible to guess what one's state will be like in the other world?

A: Well, my son, it is hard to understand the Līlā (play) of the Divine Providence. Nobody can say what leads to what. It is not possible to understand truly the internal state of a person by observing his outward conduct or manner of living. Listen. I shall tell you now about the brother of Kalivar Vedanta Vagish from what I have heard. I do not know whether what I heard regarding the boy is true; however, such things may very well happen is a fact. Kalivar Vedanta Vagish was a great scholar, while his brother was an idiot. He would often, for instance, present himself, without invitation, at the house of the acquaintances and eat there. One day Vedanta Vagish severely scolded him, saying: "you have disgraced the name of our forefathers subjecting all of us to abject humiliation. To these partake of dishes at others' houses without invitation is itself shameful enough; and that too – to make matters even worse – not in the houses of strangers but in those of known and familiar people." He said a lot of other things like this. Hearing all this the brother said, "the day of reckoning will come at the moment of death; meanwhile you go on with your pursuit of learning." A few days after this the brother fell ill. After suffering illness for sixteen or seventeen days he became desparately eager to visit the temple of the Mother (Kali temple at Kalighat). Their house was situated in Bhawanipur. He was extremely weak at that time; he was conveyed in a palanquin to the temple. Entering the temple he prostrated himself before the Divine Mother and said: "Mother! Your mad-cap son is now on his way to the other world! People used to call him by the name of some "pagla" (mad-cap). Then, coming out of the temple he entered the palanquin and said – "take me now not to my home but to the Ganga." When the palanquin reached the bank of the Ganga (a canal which is

called Ādi Ganga), he got down straightaway and descended into the water where it was shallow and muddy. Turning to his elder brother Vedanta Vagish, he said, "Dada, I am going today." Weeping, Vedanta Vagish told his brother, "indeed, what you said has now come true." The boy dies there and then.

It is impossible to comprehend divine līlā at all. Even that which you consider a grave sin often, if he so wills, helps one (the so-called sinner) to advance towards him. The song Pu--- was singing the other day - "I devoted my mind to saṃsāra but you took it away on your own," it conveys the same idea: even in the midst of things mundane he brings in a touch of ethereal, in the darkness of sin the light of blessedness. The sin that, as you all heard, of Vilvamaṅgala has the same significance. Carnal attachment to a prostitute – that is no doubt a sin. And yet that very sin helped him to advance along the way to blessedness. According to injunction (of the śāstras) one is expected strictly to observe restraint on the day of the Śrāddha ceremony of one's father; yet, even on that day he felt so restless that he could not stay at home, he proceeded on his way to the brothel – to that prostitute! There was a river that was in spate lying on the way, no boat was to be found. A bloated dead body was found floating on the river; holding on to that he crossed the river! The prostitute knew that he won't come on that day, so she was fast asleep at that time. Finding a rope hanging down the boundary wall he seized it and climbing it up to the top of the wall he got into the house. Amazed, the prostitute asked him, "how did you come in?" then hearing all that happened, she took a lamp and came to see – driven by curiosity – how a rope was hanging along the boundary wall; as she came to see for herself what the matter was, she saw not a rope but a large snake hanging down the wall. You all know this story; it is also known to you how, after this event the whole course of his subsequent life was changed.

A: Yes Sir!

Maharajji: So you see now his infatuation with a prostitute drew her up along the path of virtue.

A: Yes, "indirectly".

Maharajji: Why? "Directly". It is because you have a feeling of hatred towards it that you are unable to accept it whole-heartedly. This is why you say – "indirectly." Such things do happen, my son! I have myself seen so many cases of this kind. If you cultivate the habit of viewing the world with open eyes, you too will see many such examples. It is very difficult to judge and discriminate between sin and merit (pāpa and puṇya) from outside. May be you have committed a number of evil deeds; as a result of which, very likely, your addiction to evil deeds has passed off and you have conceived an aversion to it. Such things indeed happen in the world.

NEW CHAPTER

Q: What is bhajana? Devotion to the Divine?

A: Bhajana, spiritual effort, is done in three ways: through the body, through the mind and through words.

(1) Salutation to God by prostrating on the ground, circling around the deity, standing with folded hands – all these constitute bhajana through the body (in its corporeal form). These are the corporeal form of bhajana since they are done by the body.

(2) Muttering the name of God (japa), chanting hymns, recital from sacred texts – all these constitute bhajana through words.

(3) Meditation and reflection on the Divine through concentration of the mind- this is the mental bhajana, bhajana performed by the mind.

Each of these three kinds of bhajana has its beneficial effect. The end can be achieved quickly if all the three are performed together; deficiency in any one of three causes delay in getting the result. Of these three, mental bhajana is the best. If bhajana is performed through the other two forms, even that bears fruit, it does not go in vain; but then, in that case, the attainment of the final goal is delayed. To receive the grace of God is the ultimate result of all religious effort (bhajana); the degree to which the mind of the 'sādhaka' (spiritual aspirant) becomes pure the

flow of divine grace is directed towards him. For one who is incapable of mental bhajana, purity of the mind-stuff (citta) is achieved through the other two, but it is delayed, consequently the flow of Divine grace, signifying His pleasure, is retarded.

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Bhajana means the establishment of a relationship of love with the Divine. " I know of none else but only thee. Thou art my controller, my master and my providence. Whatever exists art thou." This is what is called single-minded devotion.

The spiritual meaning of bhajana is – remembering with love. If there is no love, muttering sacred names even thousands of time will lead nowhere. The saying that " muttering sacred name even casually bears fruit" is intended to generate inclination and devotion towards śāstric utterances. Doing everything in accordance with the teachings of the śāstras will lead to purification of the heart. Bhajana of the Divine consists in incessant muttering of His name, constant reflection on the Divine, meditation on Him and service to Him. Muttering His name mentally all the time, always keeping awake thinking on the Divine, performing all the duties in the spirit of service to the Divine – this too is bhajana of the Divine.

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In order to perform bhajana one must subject oneself to strict routine. It is just like doing one's assigned job at the office; one has to do it no matter whether one likes it or not and one has to do it abiding by strict rules. The same applies to bhajana; one must practice bhajana following a strict routine even when disinclined. One must sit down everyday at a specified time and practice japa. Unless one thus binds himself to a strict routine one cannot achieve spiritual progress.

Q: We all of us know that practice of sādhana and bhajana brings us supreme spiritual well-being and yet we cannot concentrate our minds on it. Why is this so?

A: It is because our minds are habituated to be engrossed in thoughts and talks about this world. Try to subject yourself strictly to self-restraint and rules for some time with firm determination. Try to bind yourself to strict rules governing and regulating meals, sleep and

enjoyment, also through service, japa, reading of sacred texts, good works and listening to good conversation. May be you won't relish these things at first; you may feel uncomfortable but don't, on that account, give up these rules and regulations. Continue to follow these rules and regulations with unremitting effort, calmly, with courage, reverence (faith) and earnest zeal, ignoring all other things. You break - for some reason - one of these rules today, another tomorrow for some other reason, a third day after tomorrow to please somebody – don't do like this; for, if you break a rule one day for some reason or another your mind will get an excuse and urge you to break another rule on the flimsiest pretext and thus gradually diminish your earnestness and devotion. You must constantly and firmly persuade your mind that to follow rules will lead to your spiritual well-being and violation of them will entail spiritual disaster. If you can persist thus with firmness for some time you will perceive your spiritual progress and then gradually you will come to relish it and like it. Otherwise, telling the beads throughout your life you will remain in darkness, and this surely is not the consummation of human existence.

The right thing is to perform every task at the proper time, regularly, competently, faultlessly with complete sincerity. One must give up idle talk, and one must always be careful and alert so that idle thoughts do not distract the mind. Idleness (laziness) is one of the greatest enemies of man; it should never be allowed to overcome you, laziness is nothing but "tamas"; when buddhi (intellect) is covered by tamas all impulse to act disappears. When a man is possessed by tāmasika laziness he first shuts his eyes and does nothing even when he sees his own harm and loss. He thinks, "let what is destined to happen, happen". It is often tamas that deludes a man by pretending as dharma. Such a person tells himself that "all is God's wish – that what is happening and will happen is preordained", and thus comforts himself with complacency, little knowing that thus he is rapidly proceeding towards sorrow, towards bestiality. Therefore beware of laziness; see that it never takes possession of you. You should always be on your guard against laziness. The Lord Himself has told us in the Gītā: "you should save yourself by yourself; don't allow yourself to give in to depression"

An idle brain is devil's workshop; nothing will come out of evasion. Trying to hoodwink others often ends in deceiving oneself. What one needs is earnest, sincere effort - both within and outside - and strong determination.

Q: Will muttering of japa give us everything? Is every other sādhana, like 'prāṇāyāma' for instance unnecessary?

A: Though they differ widely among themselves, in all the religious sects of India 'japa' is practiced. Everyone of them has its own mantras. Through japa alone, all the six centres of spiritual ascent (ṣat-cakra) will be pierced automatically. Through the practice of prāṇāyāma one acquires certain special powers – that is the only difference.

The six centres of spiritual ascent - sat-cakra – that are mentioned in the Tantras are not in the least exaggerated, they are entirely true. This is the natural path of spiritual development; everybody has to pass through it; but the ways of proceeding along the path are diverse. The aim of prāṇāyāma is to pierce these six centres. Rāja-yoga, which is mainly based on meditation (dhyāna) too leads to the same result – the piercing of the six centres. But most of those who intend to follow this path through various techniques have to face many obstacles. Those who have not practiced sexual continence suffer a breakdown in their health. Some are attacked with phthisis, some turn mad, some other suffer from various severe ailments like dysentery and thus suffer acutely. You - who have received this sādhana – if you practice it devotedly you will have your passage of the six centres completely opened without having recourse to any other special technique.

Q: Will the muttering of mantra (japa) alone open this channel?

A: Yes, through the mantra alone the channel will be opened. But one must concentrate on the japa. If you can concentrate your mind between the eyebrows, that is, at the mid-point as I have shown you, you will have 'bhakti' aroused in you, and then the channel will be opened at once. Practice 'nāma' (the name of the Divine) with devotion, with your whole attention concentrated on the Divine, and note carefully how far you are able to surrender yourself to Him. As you practice japa sitting with the spine erect, you will notice that with the opening of the channel, the body becomes erect as if fastened with a wire. I am not exaggerating. When the channel opens first one has an experience of great joy. In my own case, I remember how this

happened; I was sitting in a room alone, when suddenly the opening of the channel took place. When you are practicing japa this process comes into operation, though many cannot perceive it. Nevertheless, the process takes place, whether one perceives it or not.

Q: How is one to know whether the channel has opened through japa?

A: All do not have the same kind of sensation. Doing japa after fixing the mind between the two eye-brows with a feeling of devotion and self-surrender – try to practice this as long as you can. It will never do any harm. If it is performed rightly you will see that a wonderfully delicious juice – which is called 'amṛta' (ambrosia) will be dripping from above; it will seem as if you are drinking ambrosia. As soon as the channel is opened this juice will be produced through the impact of 'kuṇḍalinī' (the serpent power). A feeling of joy must follow the opening of the channel. Those who are excessively prone to 'anurāga' (love) dry up the juice.

Q: Why doesn't one enjoy nāma (sacred name)? I have been doing japa for a long time without any tangible result. Why is this so?

A: The name you practice – did you get it from the Guru? If so, why don't you feel the effect? You must. If you can keep up the spirit of service in every act and in every condition and perform japa at the same time give an effort to keep yourself away from all ideas that are opposed to 'bhakti'.

Q: Why should it be so? Hasn't Mahaprabhu told us that repeating the nāma alone is enough, that nothing else is needed?

A: No my son! Lapses in nāma, in service, offence against 'vaiṣṇava' – if all these wrongs persist in life then, the power of nāma will not manifest itself – this too he has told us. He has repeatedly warned sādhakas and sādhikas to be particularly careful so that these lapses do not happen. Performing nāma casually or without the reverence is nothing but a culpable lapse.

Q: I try my utmost to practice japa, still I do not find any taste for it. Would you kindly tell me how to do it properly so that I really enjoy it and am attracted by it?

A: I have told you many times that one should try to mutter the nāma fixing the mind between the two eyebrows so that you can you can hear the sound of the nāma clearly in uninterrupted succession. The mid-point between the two eye-brows is the real place of the mind; leaving it in its own proper place the mind wanders through the whole world One has to make repeated efforts at first to fix the mind forcibly between the eyebrows for owing to its natural restlessness, the mind will quickly leave its own place and wander; you will have to bring it back forcibly and fix it and then perform japa listening to the sound of nāma clearly pronounced within with rapt attention. Doing japa 'mentally' means performing it between the eyebrows, that is to say, at the mind's proper place. If japa is not done there, mental japa cannot take place. Japa cannot be done at the tongue, the root of the tongue or the throat. Hearing the distinctly articulated sound of the mantra between the eyebrows and thus practicing japa regularly with devotion and love gradually, you will come to enjoy nāma, it will attract you. There is attractive power in nāma. When nāma begins to attract you all objects in this world (saṃsāra) will loose their charm, you won't enjoy anything except nāma, you will be unwilling to leave it or rather will not be able to do so. If you can persist thus for a few days with determination and devotion in performing this, then and then only will you be able to feel the power and glory of nāma.

Doing nothing and lamenting continually, 'I cannot, I cannot' will lead to nowhere. Hold on to it with a firm determination, do as I have told you and then see what happens.

Q: How can I practice nāma after fixing the mind? The moment I sit down to perform japa the mind becomes even more restless; it starts to run, as it were, with terrific speed. Why is this so? How is one to fix the mind?

A: The mind is always restless. It is always running from one object to another, and you are following it. When you sit down to perform japa and try to fix it a little, only then the natural restlessness of the mind comes to your notice; only then you perceive that the mind is running,

as it were, that it is difficult to hold it. Always try to control the mind, to make it (fixed and) immobile; nothing is impossible if the effort is there. If there is a sincere effort, in due course, the mind will come under your control. It will not however be an easy job, for running after an object has become a hardened habit of the mind. If you persist wholeheartedly and unremittingly in this effort gradually the mind will begin to settle down. Exercise of restraint in all matters is the way to control the mind. Subjecting yourself to strict discipline, always try to practice self restraint in all matters; as you thus continue to perform nāma, the nāma itself will give you energy. So I tell you – try to practice japa always; in all conditions; keep it up when you are talking. The mind will not settle down immediately; it will certainly do so in due course, if you persist.

Q: I practice nāma regularly, but the mind doesn't become fixed. Often it so happens that I am telling the beads and yet I find the mind busy in making its rounds may be at the office or elsewhere thinking about this or that. I am not even aware how or when it has left me; it is long afterwards that its truancy comes to my notice. Why is this so?

A: Look, my son, it is not that your mind never becomes fixed. No. When you are firmly convinced that the performance of a certain act will do you good, and its non-performance great harm, your mind, while performing it always concentrates. Your mind concentrates on your office work since you are firmly convinced that doing your job at the office will provide you sustenance and that if you don't you will starve. Your mind sticks to it because you know failure to do your job will cause you great harm. Similarly, when you will have a firm conviction that the bhajana alone will lead to your real well-being and that forgetting Him will lead to great disaster, your mind will naturally (automatically) stick to nāma. Your conception of these is at this moment, all too vague, hence your mind cannot concentrate. You must have seen women chopping vegetables squatting on the floor. If their mind fails to concentrate on it they will risk having their fingers cut. As long as they chop vegetables they have their minds fixed on it. The same is true in all matters whenever you have something that you have to do, something which you know you cannot afford to leave undone, your mind becomes absorbed in that. So, my son, you see it is not true that your mind is totally incapable of concentration.

It is indeed difficult to control the mind. In the Bhagavadgītā Arjuna tells the Lord that to achieve mastery over the mind is as exceedingly difficult as to control the wind. To this the Lord replies, " Yes; no doubt it is so. Nevertheless, it is possible to bring the mind under control through persistent effort and renunciation." In order to control the mind you must practice it regularly. At the same time you must have renunciation (vairāgya); however much you may try you won't succeed if you don't have renunciation. Your practice, your effort in this direction will bear fruit in proportion as your degree of renunciation. Non-attachment towards objects (viṣaya) – that is the main thing; 'objects' here means objects of sense-enjoyments.

If your mind is attached to objects of desire and aversion how can you concentrate on His Name; say, you are trying to overcome anger, and yet, when something happens that excites your anger you cannot control yourself. Again, you are trying hard, for instance, to preserve chastity (brahmacarya), and yet somehow it doesn't come about. Thus, in every way you are thinking of offering your controlled mind and intellect to the Divine, but cannot succeed. Can you tell me why? Because your mind is swayed by desire for worldly objects. You must set fire to this desire – desire for objects (of sense-enjoyments). That is called renunciation or non-attachment (vairāgya). If renunciation and persistent effort (abhyāsa) go together, conquest of mind is bound to happen. (After a little pause, Swami Santadasji Maharaj said in a sympathetic tone:) to achieve renunciation and devotion to the Divine you should read the śāstras everyday and regularly. The greatest help is the company of holy men. But where will you get such company – the company of such really saintly person? Hence, the need for reading the scriptures (śāstras). If you read the sacred texts everyday, and at regular hours you will feel inspiration; such inspiration will help you a lot in your spiritual journey.

Q: I feel no desire to perform japa, I don't like it. If I force myself to do it regularly in spite of reluctance my mind becomes even more restless; I become impatient and ask myself when it will end, when I shall be free. Under these circumstances, how can I take a liking to it?

A: You will come to like it as you go on practicing japa repeatedly and regularly. Even if you do not like it, don't give it up. Try to concentrate your mind between the two eyebrows and perform japa mentally with love for the Divine and in a spirit of self-surrender. When a newly

married girl is being sent to the home of her father-in-law, you must have noticed how piteously she cries and weeps, she may desperately cling to a wooden support; she has to be wrenched away forcibly and sent to her husband's home. Though, at the initial stages, she feels such strong disinclination or even aversion, in due course, her husband's home becomes dearer and dearer to her, so that at the end she becomes so attached to her husband's home that she doesn't want to leave it at all. It is exactly the same with japa; however strong your unwillingness to do it, don't give it up. Gradually, if you persist, you will come to love it.

Q: Does the performance of japa alone have any effect? Does nāma have any power of its own?

A: What nonsense are you talking? The sacred name and the object it signifies are identical. All the scriptures and all great men are at one at this subject – the power of nāma. If you practice nāma whenever and in whatever manner, knowingly or unknowingly, under its influence good tendencies are bound to arise in varying degrees within you, a state of sāttvika purity must, to some extent at least, be aroused, it doesn't matter whether you know it or not, accept it or not. Whenever you have practiced nāma, in whatever nāma, every time you did so, you must have felt something of its good effect; you may not have perceived it every time because the good effect produced by japa was not strong enough to become perceptible to you. Practice nāma and persist in it; a day will come when its beneficial effect will become pronounced enough to come within the area of your perception. The effect of nāma-japa is unfailing and wonderful. Do you know how it is? Suppose you have built a temple on the bank of Ganga; you want to cleanse the interior of the temple. If a person who possesses extra-ordinary scientific or super-natural power succeeds in turning the course of the Ganga for once in the direction of the temple and thus makes the river water flow through the temple, it will be as thoroughly cleansed that there will be no trace of any dirt or mud. Similarly, my son, there is an eternal stream of eternal Power flowing through all time and places. What nāma-japa does is to turn this eternal stream of divine Power towards your heart. This is why and how the articulation of 'Oṃ' or any other divine name even once, the heart, as it were, washed clean. You will feel inexpressible joy, peace and a trace of divine grace. You may not have had this

experience today, even then you take it from me as true that the experience actually happens. Hence, wherever you are, in whatever manner you can go on practicing nāma-japa.

Q: How much practice of japa is necessary? At the moment of death, when one is unconscious, how is it possible for nāma to continue?

A: It is only in the case of those who practice nāma constantly that nāma manifests itself spontaneously at the time of death. They alone are blessed for they will attain the supreme state (paramāgati). Messengers of Lord Vishnu will come to fetch them. The Lord Himself declares in the Bhagavadgītā:
"He who muttering (to himself) the sacred one-letter mantra "Oṃ" and meditating on Me departs from this world, leaving the material body, attains the supreme state (paramāgati).
Muttering His nāma and remembering Him take place simultaneously. After all, it is His name. It all depends on practice. Take the case of late Kishoredasji; he passed away the other day. He used to read aloud the thousand names of Vishnu; so, when he was reminded a little he started reciting the whole thing.

Practice nāma always. When you will see that nāma is going on in whatever condition you may be in overcoming all sorts of obstacles and impediments, when it is going on in full force even during sleep – then and then alone you know for certain that you have achieved consummation (siddhāvasthā); you can be sure of full success, for, nāma then goes on un-interruptedly, transcending all hindrances - internal as well as external - even during periods of un-consciousness (i.e. sleep). Once this stage is reached the flow of nāma will never stop. At the time of death, when all the sense will become sluggish, the limbs will be benumbed, outer consciousness will cease – even then nāma will continue and after death he will be taken to His own abode; nobody will be able to touch him.

Q: How is one to practice dhyāna (meditation)?

A: To begin with, one should invest with all divinity the Guru, for instance, or an image of God. Practicing meditation in this way, the mind will begin to expand. Dhyāna will thus lead to expansion of the mind and then gradually everything will be revealed.

In order to get the full result one must practice both japa and dhyāna; both are necessary. Dhyāna should be done through body, speech and mind. Dhyāna through the body is comparatively easy, so is dhyāna through speech. If you are unable to practice dhyāna through the mind at first do not despair; and don't give up japa on that account. It is true that without dhyāna, japa alone is not wholly effective; nevertheless, if one performs only japa, even that pleases God in this Kali-yuga (the fourth and the last Great Age). However, doing japa alone without dhyāna delays attainment of the intended result (fruition).

The power of mantra is greater than the power of rūpa (form); concentration on the sound is greater than concentration on the form or image. If you can concentrate on the sound the form will automatically emerge. Concentration on the sound means hearing the sound of the mantra fixing the mind between the eyebrows – just as I have told you. Through meditation of this kind your whole body will be permeated through and through with the sound of the nāma. Meditation not on the form of the Divine but on the sound of His name alone is quite legitimate, for sound too is a form of the Divine.

Q: How is the Guru to be meditated on, in the standing posture or the seated?

A: As you like. Meditate on the standing posture if you can. Try to visualize him, while meditating, as a radiant figure while meditating on His figure – and I have told you where – keep thinking that the Guru is seeing your inside as well as outside – everything. Gradually you will realize that you are with the Guru.

Q: How is one to achieve control over the senses?

A: Everybody follows his own inclinations (pravṛtti) like a slave. Abide by the injunctions of the śāstras – that alone in itself will lead to self-control. The general rule is this: I shall perform every act following śāstric injunctions without serving like a slave my own natural inclinations. I shall do works (karma) without transgressing the prescription of the śāstras. Suppose, you feel a desire to eat something; in such a case, find out what the śāstras have to say on the matter and follow it. What you are not to eat and when, decide after consulting the śāstras and not in accordance with your own inclinations. Once you develop the habit of doing everything following your own inclinations you become their slave and you ultimately loose the very power to overcome them. Suppose, at the sight of some edible object you feel greedy and yet, it may so happen that your body will not be able to stand it. Such a state of affairs signifies complete slavery. If the parents take care to teach self-restraint to their sons and daughters from childhood, observance of rules become easier.

When the natural instincts (pravṛtti) become strong you should look up to the Divine (and pray to Him) with folded hands. He will gradually diminish the force of these natural tendencies and inclinations. The ancient sages have declared that in these days even a little effort elicits from God relatively greater rewards than ever before (for He is pleased more easily). Spiritually, the existing circumstances are hostile; in relation to religion we are passing through a dark night, as it were. This is why even a little spiritual effort nowadays pleases God Who helps him in every way. Judged from this point of view therefore 'Kali-yuga' is the best of all ages (Yugas); for, in the other ages the general ambience is congenial to religion, and the general level of spiritual development then remained high. In the Kali-yuga, as I have said, even a little effort brings forth divine grace. So there is no reason for you to despair; go on practicing bhajana, no matter how much. If you have a sincere desire for attainment of purity of heart, that is good, even if you don't succeed at first. You will see that in due course divine grace will descend on you. But – you must persevere; that is very important.

Q: How are the house-holders to practice self-restraint? They are always involved in all sorts of objects of sense-enjoyments; their minds too hanker after enjoyments. What's the way out?

A: Almost all the ancient sages of India were house-holders. most of them had wife and children and yet they were ṛṣis(seers), munis (sages) and brahmachārīs (successful practitioners of sexual continence). It should be remembered that when God created the senses and objects of sense-enjoyments He didn't issue the commandment: "never enjoy yourselves". A house-holder should by all means indulge in sense-enjoyments but always in accordance with prescribed rules regarding them. Enjoying thus all objects of sense according to rules laid down by the śāstras a house-holder is entitled to be called a sage, a seer and a brahmachārī. I have told you already that human life is not meant for the pursuit of sense-pleasures, to be immersed in them; the one objective of human life is realization of the Self (Ātman). Self-realization is never achieved through "bhoga" (enjoyment of objects); renunciation (tyāga) alone leads to that. Keeping before him always this ideal of renunciation, of self-realization should enjoy objects of senses for the sustenance of the body and for the maintenance of the family line – and all this as far as possible in a spirit of non-attachment. The Īśa-upaniṣad declares in the very first śloka:

Īśāvāsyamidaṁ sarvam yat kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat,
tena tyaktena bhuñjīthāḥ māgṛdhaḥ kasyasviddhanam.

- All this is pervaded by the Divine, all objects of this world are perpetually changing. Enjoy all objects therefore, in a spirit of non-attachment; don't covet the riches of another. Enjoyment of all objects through the senses in accordance with prescribed rules, keeping before one this ideal (of the Upaniṣad) never blocks the road to spiritual well-being. It is desire and attachment that causes bondage; through bhoga in spirit of non-attachment – as mentioned above – desires dwindle and attachments are loosened; hence, in this state, thinking and meditating on the Divine, spiritual discrimination – all these can continue un-interrupted.

Intercourse with one's wife after her post-menstrual ablutions performed only with a view to pay the debt of the forefathers – that is, to keep up the family line – doesn't constitute a violation of

the vow of chastity (brahmacarya). Once children are born one should give up further intercourse with one's wife. In the case of those who are unable to do so, intercourse with one's wife should be stopped on special days of the lunar month – e.g. Sundays, the first quarter of the Moon, the new Moon, the full Moon, the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight, the last day of the month and days of religious festivals. Further, it should be strictly avoided during the day. Apart from sex, one should practice abstention from other kinds of sense-enjoyments on special days.

The habit of strict observance of rules, both positive and negative, will gradually and naturally lead to self-restraint (saṃyama). You will find in the almanac particular days of the lunar month when the eating of this or that vegetable is forbidden; there are other days mentioned when the sex act or eating fish or oil is prohibited. In former days the almanac was the great guide of the house-holder; before sitting down to chop vegetables the house-wives used to consult regularly the almanac. Along with this daily observance of restraint one should start the practice of restraint during a whole month. During four months of the year – the Vaiśākha, Śrāvaṇa, Kārtika and Māgha – one has to take strictly regulated vegetarian meals after morning bath and perform, to the best of one's ability japa, worship, reading of sacred texts and meditation. During those four months one should abstain from sexual intercourse; husband and wife should observe these rules, as far as possible, after mutual agreement.

Like daily rituals, worship and reading of sacred texts one should observe silence for sometime everyday. Apart from this observance of silence one should try to cultivate the habit on a particular day of the week and a particular month. Readings from the texts and chanting of hymns do not constitute a breach of silence. The highest form of silence is that in which no attempt is made to express one's thoughts and feelings through sounds or gesture of any kind so that one remains like a log of wood, as it were. Of course, observing silence of this extreme sort is not possible for everybody; hence, to begin with, one should practice at least oral silence. Most of us, for instance, remain silent in the morning till the completion of daily worship. One can, if one wishes, perform worship and reading from the texts remaining silent.

It may not be possible for all to take haviṣyānna (rice, clarified butter, boiled vegetables and milk) during holy months, but one may then at least refrain from taking fish and delicacies of all kinds. In former days, many widows used to take haviṣyānna during those months. Another very good habit in this direction (of self-restraint) is not to take anything without getting it consecrated by offering to God.

To go to sleep at a regular hour and to get up from bed at least before sunrise and then perform ablutions – these are things that everybody must perform. Cultivation of these habits make life well-regulated and restrained and thus gradually leads one towards the Divine.

Q: How can one preserve brahmacarya best and in the easiest way?

A: You have asked a very good question, my son! It is owing to the lack of brahmacarya; the break-down of the traditional stage (āśrama) of brahmacarya that our country has degenerated so much. Look, my son! There are several higher stages of brahmacarya alone. But now, let us confine ourselves to bodily brahmacarya alone. Bodily brahmacarya means preservation of the seminal fluid (śukra). This is the root, the very basis of everything; without this nothing will be achieved. It is the oily fluid that is responsible for the smooth functioning of every organ of the body from the brain downwards. Do you know how? It is comparable to the function of lubricating oil in a machine. No machine can operate smoothly without lubrication; besides, it corrodes quickly. It is shocking the way you waste the seminal fluid and will go on wasting – how often and how much! You must clearly and fully realize the extent of its harmful effect, and how much necessary it is to preserve it. You must constantly, even fearfully, careful in this regard. If you can conduct yourself in this way and somehow manage to get over temptations you will feel mental vigour within you, and become stronger.

What is needed for this is the company of holy men. But to get such company for you is indeed difficult. You must avoid mixing with members of the other sex, you must keep them at a distance (remain aloof from them). If seeing women becomes unavoidable, make it a point to look only at their feet. While walking along the street keep your gaze fixed on the great toes of your feet, without looking in any other direction. If you can conduct yourself in this manner for a

few days, my son, you will feel strength in your mind then it will no longer be necessary to observe rules, so strictly. Whatever people may say on this subject, don't forget one thing. You must remember that if you want to achieve spiritual progress you must observe brahmacarya (sexual continence), must preserve the seminal fluid. Without retention of the semen it is impossible for the mind to concentrate, and without concentration of the mind spiritual progress is impossible.

Q: How is it possible to observe brahmacarya in one's married life?

A: Yes, there are rules regarding this. In order to produce good offspring one should observe rules of brahmacarya in married life. Union should take place only once or twice in a month; you will see that as a matter of fact, if you are to choose for bodily union, really auspicious days and moments, omitting of course the first few days of menstruation, you will not get one or two days in a month. Intercourse between husband and wife should be totally stopped after conception, and after the birth of the child; this abstention should be continued for eighteen months. How few observe these restrictions nowadays!

One should observe the rules regarding suitable days and hours. In former days, the lives of house-holders were regulated in such a manner that the chances of having bodily relationships on auspicious days or hours were very little. It was customary then for the mother-in-law to keep the daughter-in-law close to her. Things are different nowadays, when, as soon as the son gets married, husband and wife live separately, severing all links with the family. The two live together day and night. Under these circumstances, how can self-restraint exist? We often regret our boys lack brahmacarya; but are they really to blame? It is their parents who are more guilty. Even after the conception they go on gratifying their sex desire during those ten months. As a result, the children thus born to them are filled to the brim with lust from their very moment of birth. How can one expect that for them following the path of brahmacarya will be easy or natural? Only those who have good luck can take to the path of brahmacarya. Our parents today cannot speak to their children about brahmacarya through a sense of shame. It is better for them not to feel ashamed in this matter.

Q: Why is it necessary to observe rules and restrictions regarding food? What are your views on this? Is it wrong to eat meat?

A: The staple food of Europeans (white men) is beef. And yet, I have seen among them persons who are sāttvika by nature. In your Bengal and some areas in the Himalayas people take fish; yet there are many among them who are endowed with sattva-guṇa (purity of heart). There is a place in the Himalayas called 'Tehri'. Even the common people there are as good by nature that once when a thief was caught, a large crowd assembled just to see what a thief looks like. And yet, people of that region take fish. It cannot be said therefore that eating fish or meat is wrong.

I knew, when I was in Calcutta, a muslim fakir (monk). He was very sāttvika in nature and yet I had seen him eat beef with my own eyes. He would often be seen standing rapped with a rug, by the main gate of Nakhoda mosque in Calcutta. One day, a man was passing by the mosque. Calling out to him the Fakir-sahib said, "Pandey-ji, you won't die". But Pandey-ji would not understand the meaning of these words. The sky was overcast; shortly after this a storm broke out followed by a heavy shower. Pandey-ji took shelter under a verandah by the main road. Suddenly, the verandah above Pandey-ji's head crashed down. Pandey-ji then saw the Fakir-sahib place his hand over his head from a distance so that no portion of the collapsed roof of the verandah fall on his head. Fakir-sahib did this without moving from where he stood, near the mosque which was at least seventy-five feet away. It was a friend of mine who related this incident to me; he told me that he saw with his own eyes how Fakir-sahib placed his hand over Pandey-ji's head and thus saved him. This Fakir-sahib was a man of considerable spiritual power; how, then, can it be said that taking forbidden food is absolutely detrimental to a man's spiritual development.

Let me tell you what I have realized regarding this subject of food, after long thought. The example of the Earth will make my point clear. When you plant a tree it will absorb from the soil only those elements from the soil which it needs according to its special nature and reject the rest. It is just so with regard to food; every human being will absorb from the food he takes only those elements which he needs according to his nature. What, if the food happens to be meat?

If, for instance, one is sāttvika by nature he will absorb from meat only that element which is sāttvika. This is my own conclusion on this matter.

If one is not endowed with a considerable degree of sāttvika purity, eating without discrimination may do harm; hence, ordinary men should observe prescribed general rules regarding food.

As a matter of fact (indeed) no food is absolutely forbidden if you have the power (to assimilate it). Every meal you take has God within it; these rules regarding food have been laid down because you are weak. If you can develop sufficient strength and attain a high stage of spiritual development you can eat whatever you like; even meat, which we are rejecting as inedible is, after all, a transformation of earth and water. If this is so, where does really exist any difference between meat and any other kind of food? What food would you then reject? For one who has realized Brahman no food is unacceptable. Why then doesn't he take all kinds of food indiscriminately? It is only in order to set an example before and thus educate the people. For themselves there is no need for any rules and regulations.

"The manner in which a superior person conducts himself is followed by others, what he proves by his own example as the best way leading to general well-being, the other emulate" [The Bhagavadgītā (3.21)]

The final effect of right conduct (sadācāra) is equality of outlook (samadarśana). The Śrutis have said so. The ṛṣis (sages) have not prescribed these rules to create divisive tendencies. Though 'All is Brahman' (sarvam khalvidam brahma) you cannot take and assimilate poison like Mahadeva (Shiva). You may speak out of equality of vision (samadarśana) but then you cannot feel disgust of faeces. Trailanga Svāmī even ate faeces, but you cannot do that. If you are sufficiently powerful you can eat whatever you like; it is possible to attain such a state.

Śankarācārya, so the story goes, once took food at a certain place from a person of low caste. Noticing this, one of his disciples also did the same. Later, Śankarācārya arriving at blacksmith's shop swallowed molten iron and then sat down at a certain place. There he turned to that disciple and said, 'at the other place, following my example, you took food from a low caste

person. Why then, following my example, didn't you eat molten iron?' Saying this he abandoned that disciple.

Even those who are possessed of exceptional power observe prescribed rules of conduct in order to instruct people. Your attitude towards taking forbidden food should be: "as I have not attained sufficient purity of the mind, I am unable to take this."

Q: Then what is the need for discrimination regarding food? What sort of food is forbidden?

A: The state of your mind depends to a large extent on the state of your body. If you drink, you will have a certain state of mind. There are certain items of food which, if you eat them, will intensify carnal desire. One who wishes to overcome sex desire (lust) should not take any food which arouses sexual desire. Similarly, administration of certain drugs tend to cure insanity or mental restlessness. If this is so, how can it be said that the state of the mind has nothing to do with the nature of the food taken? Our mental tendencies are, as a matter of fact, vary, closely related to the quality of food we take.

Generally speaking, intoxicating liquors, meats and eggs are forbidden; so are onion and garlic. Partaking of food taken by others is forbidden. But if the food happens to be taken by your parents you can take it as prasāda (consecrated food). You may take food left by your parents, however, only if you regard it as prasāda. It doesn't follow however that prasāda of all kinds may be taken by all; it is not so. Nevertheless, even if you don't take it do not scorn it or treat it with disrespect. There is no inherent defect or taint in any object. The śāstric injunctions regarding them are due only to divergences of human nature and innate tendencies. What is harmful for a sick person is good for one who enjoys normal health; what is execrable or disgusting for man may be wholesome for other animals; what may be detestable for one kind of human beings may be sacred for another. 'Pāyasa' (a sweet dish made of rice and milk) for instance is a delicious food but if you give it to a person, who is seriously ill, may cause his death. The determination of good or bad with respect to everything is of this kind, Human excrement is something which is extremely impure and detestable to you, but to some other animals it is delicious food. So, no object is hateful or impure in itself; the Paramahaṃsa (a saint of a very

high order) sees everything as holy and divine (Brahma-maya). It is true that at present you are not capable of this vision; even then, you should not detest or despise any object or any person. That the ancient sages (ṛṣis) have made discriminations is only on account of differences in your physical and mental states. You should bear in mind therefore that you are weak and (spiritually) unwell; you are not able to accept and assimilate everything. Hence, you should offer your 'iṣṭa' (the god one worships) only those items of food which you are able to assimilate and accept as prasāda. It doesn't follow however that whatever you are unable to take because you are ill or weak is therefore on that account detestable; it is simply that you are incapable.

As a rule it is spiritually harmful to partake of food eaten by others. The physical and mental attributes of the person whose leavings are eaten pass on to eater. This is the reason why the taking of such food is not good; since the ṛṣis have forbidden it. This however, doesn't apply to food eaten or leftover by one's elders, for in such cases the good qualities of the former pass on to the latter who receives their blessings. Hence, taking the food leftover by one's father, mother and husband is permissible. Barring those exceptions, one should not take any food which is already eaten by others.

Q: How should one eat?

A: A vaiṣṇava should not take anything except prasāda (food offered to the deity). If the food has not been thus offered to the deity he should, before taking it, perform japa of his iṣṭa-mantra eight times just as the worshipper instills life into the divine image so one should, before eating, make the food filled with the spirit of Viṣṇu. Everything is no doubt, already divine; nothing that exists is without Him. But then, it must be felt by you; become a part of your knowledge. A vaiṣṇava should worship the food with sacred 'tulasī' leaves, meditate on the Divine and offer it to Him. Finally he should offer this mantra from the Bhagavadgītā:

brahmārpaṇaṃ brahmahavirbrahmāgnau brahmanāhutam,
brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarma samādhinā.

- " The offering, the thing offered, the sacred fire in which the offering is made, the person who makes the offering – all is Brahman. Brahman is the final goal of all work that is dedicated to Him."

While eating, one should control one's speech and mutter one's iṣṭa-mantra over each morsel of food, constantly remembering the Divine; it is also desirable to avoid being seen by others at the time of eating. One should think that every morsel of food is an offering, sanctified by the iṣṭa-mantra, to the Divine. If you can do this, not only your tongue but your whole body, your whole being, will be filled with bliss. It is obvious that this cannot happen if you take your food in the midst of a crowd and all sorts of disturbances.

If one looks at food with greedy eyes, it at once gets polluted. You should therefore have your meals behind the eyes of others as far as possible. You should protect yourself as a patient does, but don't harbour any ill-will towards anybody. If, at any time, you suddenly feel the need to take some food, perform japa of your iṣṭa-mantra over the food eight times. Then, thinking that the food has turned into amṛta (ambrosia), offer it to the deity and then start eating. Whatever food you may take should be taken thus – performing japa of iṣṭa-mantra over it and then offering it to God – is turned into prasāda. Whenever you take any food even if it is only water, do it remembering God all the time.

Q: Practicing nāma-japa and exercising restraint in one's food and movements – is this all that is required to have God's pleasure?

A: No, one must have non-attachment (vairāgya) at the same time. However much you may practice these things, without vairāgya nothing will come of it. Practicing restraint will bear fruit in proportion to the degree of vairāgya. Non-attachment towards objects of enjoyment – that is essential; it is the root of all (spiritual progress). By objects (viṣaya) I mean objects of sense-enjoyments.

If the mind is attached to objects of desire how can one concentrate one's mind on nāma? It may so happen that you are making an effort to overcome anger, but the moment something

happens to excite your anger, you give way. Again, you may be planning to maintain brahmacarya but somehow you are not being able to do so. Similarly, you may be thinking of offering to the Divine a mind that is under your control fully but cannot. Do you know why? It is because of desire – desire for sense-objects. You must set fire to desire – that is vairāgya. The mind cannot be still if it is drawn towards objects.

Renouncing the world (that is giving up the life of house-holder) alone is not enough for the attainment of the Divine; so long as you are subject to desire you cannot reach God. Taking sannyāsa (renouncing the world) is fruitful only when one feels real vairāgya within one's soul; otherwise, deserting one's wife and children with a view to adopting sannyāsa is wrong. Giving up attachment is what is essential. After that, if one is engaged in karma, one is a yogin, if one renounces karma, one becomes a sannyāsin.

You should try to feel joy without holding any attachment towards any object or any person in the world; you must drive out from within, all desire. Giving up all attachment – that is the heart of the matter. What is needed is not external renunciation, but renunciation from within. You should always keep in mind that nothing in this world belongs to you; there is nothing that you really need (in this world).

Everything in this world, the whole saṃsāra is God's. When you say 'this is mine', 'that is mine' – you are guilty of blasphemy. You don't, as a matter of fact, have any real control over anything or any person. When you are dead, what connection will remain with your home and family? Your wife, your son and daughter – none is really yours. It is their karma that has brought them to you. Your union with them is like the transitory meeting of floating logs, brought together by the current; they will soon drift apart. How then can they be said to belong to you?

Wife, son, daughter – none belongs to you. You have only the right and the obligation to bring them up and serve. If you keep up this attitude the children or the household will not constitute a bond. When the sense of 'ye' and 'mine' leaves you there will be no sorrow. This body is only a room you live in; if the room crumbles down in an earthquake your mind is not affected; in a like

manner, the loss of your son or even your own body, will have little effect on you if you are rid of this sense of 'I and mine'. You should cultivate such an attitude in regard to everything.

All bondage to this world (saṃsāra) springs from identification of this body as the self. This is the reason why we are pleased with those who show concern and solicitude for this body of ours; they appear to us as near and dear ones. If this identification with the physical body as the self ceases what else can draw us to this saṃsāra? How can this thinking-the-body-as-one's-self (dehātmabuddhi) be destroyed? The answer is: by trying to realize calmly and firmly; by virtue of the power that comes through spiritual effort (bhajana), that this body is not 'I', that I am something other than this body. This body is destined to die one day, but that doesn't put an end to the 'I'; it continues to exist.

Q: How does vairāgya (non-attachment) come?

A: Through the company of holy men (sat-sanga) and frequent discriminating reflection (vicāra). The effect of good company is very great. To be near the Guru is often more salutary than listening to his teachings. Every person, every animal, even a tree exerts its own influence which is transmitted to others. There is a Neem tree in Aligarh which possesses such power that patients afflicted with fever are cured when kept under it. Similarly, living in close company of spiritually advanced persons does immense good. The influence of such persons operates through the subconscious and eventually their power manifests itself. The company of the great (sat-sanga) is what is what matters most; through its influence devotion (bhakti), faith, reliance, non-attachment – all these come.

In this world everything is God's. I am His servant. Everybody, every person in this world belongs to God. Nothing, no one belongs to me; God has sent him or her to receive my service (sevā); my relationship with others is only that of service. If you can understand this rightly, realize it, your ego (ahaṃ) will disappear and you will attain the state of vairāgya.

Eating, sleeping, copulating – all these things can be easily obtained even in animal birth. Enjoyment of sense objects cannot be the aim of human life; human life is meant for something

else: for devotion to God; for self-realization, longing for sense-enjoyment must be totally abandoned. You shouldn't eat your food to satisfy your palette. You have no work to do for yourself; your only work is to serve God. The greater this degree of this spirit of service in you, the holier your life will become. Everything is meant for His service; nothing, no work (karma) should be done for bodily pleasure and sense-enjoyments; to feed one's body, to clothe it – even these should be done in a spirit of service to the Divine. This house in the form a body has been given to me to dwell in by Him, to serve Him and Him alone. So, this divine gift (of a house) has to be taken care of. Keep up constantly in your mind this spirit of service; then and then alone, will vairāgya come.

Q: Respected Sir! Instead of speaking about yoga, japa and tapas (ascetic austerities) you have been telling us repeatedly about sevā (service).

A: Look, my son! The spiritual exercises you mention are difficult to perform in these times. Fortunately, a sādhana (spiritual exercise) which is easier to perform and more suited to our age has appeared. We are now passing through the Śudra-yuga; and the dharma of the śudras is sevā (service); it is dharma of the Age (yuga-dharma). Serve all creatures as embodiments of the Divine. I tend to still the mind. And when the mind is stilled, prāṇa (vital breath) too becomes stilled; the two, manas (mind) and prāṇa are closely related; the one draws the other. Exercises like prāṇāyāma are not therefore obligatory; the mind can be fixed even without them.

Q: How is it possible to achieve spiritual progress through sevā alone?

A: (With warmth) will you tell me what exactly you understand by spiritual progress? You serve everybody – including even the maids and servants in your house – knowing that God dwells in all beings, your ego will be gradually destroyed; you will become selfless; you will see God everywhere. If this is not spiritual progress what else is it? Tell me.
This saṃsāra (world) is His. He is present in every being, not partly but wholly. Every work of this work of this world should be done for His service, for His grace (pleasure). If you can live thus, firmly established in this belief (in the divinity of all beings), this very saṃsāra will become divinized.

'This saṃsāra is His, and I am His servant' – this idea must be clearly and firmly developed; it should be practiced all the time – in body, mind and speech.

Q: How will this spirit of sevā come?

A: Conceiving this entire universe as His, and thus regarding every being as Divine, you should consider yourself His servant. It is His saṃsāra; it is He who is present everywhere, in every creature. I am His servant – this idea should be developed, should be cultivated in body, mind and speech. If this sādhanā is practiced through all these three means – body, mind and speech – it becomes more effective. You should try to your utmost ability; Of course He will see that you are trying your best. Serve everybody without making any discrimination; serve even a thief. You should behave towards everybody in a spirit of sevā; give up the idea – 'I am superior'. Serve all creatures as much as you can, giving up laziness. You may think so and so has committed a sin; but what is that to you? You go on serving.

Perform every work in the saṃsāra in the spirit of service. Serve everybody in the conviction that you are serving Him. You should regard your son, for instance, as an embodiment of God Himself; this attitude will tend to rid you of delusion (moha). If you know that every object, every person is His, you will gradually become free from all delusive attachment, all bondage. Whatever object you regard as your own, will bind you. Whenever you think in terms of 'mine' and 'yours' you fall into delusion (moha). When you are feeding your son for instance, you should do it as nurse does; you are just a servant, nothing else. If you can regard yourself as a servant of all you will go up (spiritually) quickly, you will receive divine grace.

Q: Would you please tell us something about the development of this 'spirit of service' in ancient India?

A: (Reciting a mantra of tarpaṇa):

nirāhārāśca ye jīvā pāpe dharme ratāśca ye
teṣāmāpyāyanāyaitat dīiyate salilaṃ mayā.

- 'I offer this holy water for the entertainment of those creatures who starve, and also those who are involved in sinful acts'.

You see here – not only human beings, not only friends and the virtuous men but also those who are engaged in sin are to be served. In the verses that precede, even the ferocious creatures like snakes, birds, demons, even trees are mentioned; all of them are to be served.

Don't think that sevā is an easy affair. It is the easiest and surest of all sadhanas. Even this sevā will turn out to be beyond you; let alone sādhanas of a higher order.

Q: What is the sādhanā of dāsya-bhāva (spirit of service)?

A: The word dāsa (servant) signifies total subordination in which the sense of separate existence is absent. If you have the sense of a separate entity you are not a dāsa; for the greater the degree of one's separate existence the less one is a servant. A real servant is a part of the master, just as your hand, for instance, is a part of your body; it has no independent existence, it moves when you move it, it remains where you put it. For one, who is a real dāsa (servant) the master is his very soul; he has no sense of separation from his master. The sādhaka who is a follower of this path of service always separates himself as wholly controlled by the Divine and meditates on Him as his very Soul (Ātman). There are three stages of dāsya-bhāva. First, feeling oneself a dāsa but with a sense of distinction. His attitude is: 'I am your servant; I have served according to the capacity you have given me'. Here the sense of 'I am the doer' persists, though he feels he is dependent on God. Second, being dāsa with a sense of both difference and non-difference. At this stage the sense 'I am the doer' disappears. The sādhaka feels that very act of his is being performed through divine power and impulsion. Third, being dāsa with a sense of complete non-difference (abheda) At this stage karma disappears. The sādhaka sees everything as the eternal play (līlā) of the Divine; he feels that it is He who

does everything; He urges the thief to steal and at the same time warns the house-holder against him.

First try to achieve purification of karma in this manner: tell yourself – 'I am doing nothing, I am just a puppet in your hands'. Make full use of all the powers God has given you and say to yourself – 'His will is the only will, I have no will of my own.'

The Lord of the universe is playing; you should therefore do your work in a spirit of play. If you can do this nothing in the world can bind you. Win or defeat is always there, but it doesn't matter in a game.

You have no work (karma) of your own – it is only service. The more you can imbibe in the spirit of service (dāsya), the holier your life will become. Everything is meant for His service.

One who will be a servant (dāsa) must not possess anything of his own; if he does, he will become so much less a servant. A true servant will keep thinking all the time – 'I have become His'. Thinking constantly in this way the mind will become free from restlessness. Since, everybody is a part of Him, he keeps telling himself 'I must remain a servant of all'. When you are staying at the aśrama, whatever work you are called upon to do should be regarded as His work. When every work will come to be regarded as divine work, you will be on firm ground; you will then have no fear of a fall or lapse. Peace will not come to you unless and until you are able to regard everything as divine. Whatever work may fall to your lot through God's Will, should be accepted with a glad heart, otherwise you will get no peace. But there must be love within – that is essential. Practice self-control and you will enjoy happiness. You should never give way to depression. The result of your spiritual effort (bhajana) should be this: (there will be) no desire which goes against His Will. You will do, of course, what is needed to preserve the body, but nothing to gratify your palate. We (vaiṣṇavas and sādhus) assume names with a 'dāsa' at the end – a practice which tends to diminish the idea of sense enjoyments and thus keep up the spirit of service. To me, there is no distinction between a paisa and a hundred thousand rupees, for everything is only for the service of the Lord. Whatever He gives for that purpose is His

Grace (kṛpā). We are not the owner; just as even a paisa belongs to Him, so do a million rupees.

All are equal to Him; He is the Lord of the universe, hence, a million rupees is no more to Him than a paisa.

Q: In worshipping God through a feeling of friendship (sakhya) or parental affection (vātsalya) or amorous sweetness (madhura bhāva) superior to this attitude of service (dāsya)? In some sects worshipping God in the spirit of a lover has been described as the highest form of worship. What is your view on this?

A: These three ways of worship (bhajana) are widely practiced among the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava sects. Every human being is subject more or less to ignorance (avidyā); a sense of dualism (dvaita) is therefore natural to man. These three ways (sakhya, vātsalya and madhura) of worshipping God are based on this sense of dualism. In dāsya-bhāva, the sādhaka feels himself as wholly subject to the Lord, obliterating all sense of independent existence. A true servant (dāsa) is a part of the Lord, with no separate existence of his own; he moves when moved by Him and remains contented in whatever condition it pleases Him to place him in. The Lord is his Master (Controller), his very Self. He is one with the Lord; the sense of dualism is absent.

If the object of worship is really looked upon as God, as the omnipresent, Īśvara, it is impossible for one to entertain towards Him the feeling of a friend, a parent or a lover. As a matter of fact it is possible to really regard somebody as a friend only when the latter is thought of a human being and an equal – as Kṛṣṇa was by His friends – the shepherd boys (gopa) of the Vraja. Similarly, parental affection (vātsalya) may be aroused only towards a boy who is regarded as deserving protection and appears to be sweet and delicate; but parental feeling of this kind is impossible to entertain towards a person who is regarded as divine. In the same manner a lover's (amorous) feeling (madhura-bhava) can arise in the case of a feminine person towards a male person who happens to be tender, handsome and lovable. Such feelings may arise towards the divine image in the case of only a few fortunate persons.

When God assumed the human form as an avatāra (incarnation) in Vraja, naturally His parents felt vātsalya towards Him, the shepherd boys of the same age felt sakhya and Gopīs the amorous emotion. After He (Kṛṣṇa) left the world, throughout the ages, this or that person, here or there felt one or the other of these emotions after meditating on His divine līlā (play) and divine form (rūpa) and thus been attracted towards Him. These emotions and attitudes (bhāvas) are nevertheless, not fit for general imitation.

Whoever happens to have, through good luck, one or the other of these feelings does not regard the image of the object of these feelings as divine; he looks upon the image as that of a friend, a child or a beloved. Those in whose hearts such feelings are firmly established are naturally drawn towards this image, whom they passionately love in one of these attitudes, devote themselves to meditation on the divine, listening to His līlā, singing about it and thinking constantly on it; these constitute their bhajana. Through such single-minded and loving meditation on the object of love, all their worldly desires disappear and thus become absorbed in His thought. Had attachment of this kind been felt towards an ordinary human being, it would have been a cause of bondage; it does not become so because it is directed towards divine image; for, as is well-known, the meditator gradually imbibes the nature of the object of meditation. Hence it is that through such attachment to such attachment to the divine image (as friend, child and lover) one's heart becomes purified, and in the degree his heart attains purity, he feels increasing joy in meditating on the beloved image. The Lord has declared in the Gita – "ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃstathaiva bhajāmyaham" (I accept every worshipper no matter how he approaches Me.) To such worshippers therefore the God appears in their beloved form (as friend, child or lover), offers them appropriate forms of enjoyment, entertaining them with His companionship. After their death they attain to divine worlds and remain there. After staying there and thus enjoying the company of the Divine their souls become more and more purified and finally, when they are rid of the last traces of all sense of dualism attain mokṣa (liberation) and enjoy eternal bliss. This is known as krama-mukti (gradual liberation).

But this, it should be remembered, is not to be recommended for the great majority of human beings. Very few people, as a matter of fact, naturally develop such feelings – like kānta, sakhya

or vātsalya – towards divine image. Hence, it is not meant for general imitation. If a person naturally develops such feelings or attitudes towards the Divine he will attain, more or less easily, relative purity of the mind and thus gets, through this alone, the object of his desire.

There is no real contradiction between this view and that of our sampradāya (sect). There were some ācāryas of our sampradāya in whom these emotional attitudes (towards God) manifested themselves spontaneously. Śrī Harivyas Acārya used to worship the dual form (yugala) of the Deity as a sakhī (female companion or mate). There is a tradition which shows that the Lord appeared to Ghamand-devācārya as a lover during the 'Rāsa' festival and then offered His crown to him as a gift. The crown had long been preserved in the Karela village in Vraja. It was Ghamand-deva who left behind a long line of singers who celebrate Rāma-līlā; they will sing and display Yugala-Śataka by Śrī Bhaṭṭaji and the charming Mahā-vānī padas before a spellbound audience.

But in our sampradāya such attitudes are not considered worthy of general imitation – neither as a method nor as an ideal. For Vaiṣṇavas in general the attitude of a servant (dāsya-bhāva) is regarded as the most commendable sādhana and therefore accepted as the best suited for all in our sampradāya.

Q: Is this dāsya-bhāva something as self-surrender? How is one to surrender his self?

A: Dāsya-bhāva is the first stage; at this stage the sense of 'I am His dāsa' persists; every work is done as service to God or the Guru. At the end this self-sense (ahaṃ) disappears; and with that the sense of separate existence. At this stage the sādhaka feels himself as a part of the Lord and realizes that even the power to act is not his own, that it is He who is getting everything done – through him.

Realizing that one has no power to do anything in any matter, the more one can humbly surrender oneself to the Guru, who is divine Grace incarnate, the more rapidly one progresses along the spiritual path. Knowing this with absolute certainty one must give up all kinds of self-sense and egoism. This self-sense and egoism is the great obstacle to self-surrender.

Exercising your intelligence and strength to the utmost read the śāstras (sacred spiritual texts), practice bhajana and sevā (service), and remain content with this. 'I have achieved nothing', 'alas, I am undone' – lamenting like this will only increase tamas; giving up self pity of this kind and realizing that the fruits of your action are in the hands of God, that they are not in the least subject to your will, remain contented; this is the only way to peace. Those who are excessively eager and want to realize God overnight, end by delaying attainment. As the scriptures declare – 'the hasty cannot get Him' (na tvaramāṇena labhyaḥ). Studying sacred texts and practicing bhajana during specified hours and serving, at other times, all jīvas (creatures) as embodiments of the Divine – this is extremely salutary. If one can do this one ceases to feel any attachment to karma and thus is able finally to attain jīvan-mukti (liberation in this body).

Between sevā (service) and japa sevā should come first. Through sevā the mind becomes pure and consequently fixed and capable of concentration and free from lethargy. It is then and only then that one becomes really fit for spiritual exercise (bhajana).

Always try to give yourself over to the guru; this is what is called self-surrender. Upon this depends, ultimately, the spiritual well-being of the disciple. The more you surrender yourself to the guru the more closely you will be linked with him. The first consequence of self-surrender is disappearance of identification with the body (dehātma-buddhi). When one surrenders oneself wholly to the guru, one becomes the master's servant (dāsa). To become a dāsa one has to get rid of one's separate identity; the more one has one's self-sense, the less one is a servant. When one becomes fully a dāsa one has nothing of his own.

This attitude of a servant (dāsya-bhāva) means this: 'I am wholly under your control, you are my very self.' It is the feeling: 'I am only an instrument.' If you can remain in this state of utter submission you will attain your goal easily. Guru-śakti is always flowing; if one can give oneself over to it this śakti will immediately begin to operate within. In the degree to which you set up your ego the operation of this śakti will be delayed.

To carry out the words of the guru is the established path; and this is the real service of the guru – guru-sevā. The first need is – to do what the guru says, without questioning. Perform every

work as service to the guru, not for your own self; for this you must cease to entertain hopes for your own happiness. 'We are the servants of God, we have taken His name' – this way of thinking automatically diminishes the desire for self enjoyment (bhoga). Dāsya-bhāva of this kind stabilizes the mind. Self-indulgence (bhoga) and sevā are incompatible; in the degree in which the spirit of service is developed your tendency towards self-enjoyment will diminish.

When you stay with the guru, carry out his injunctions with reverence and devotion; when you are away from the guru you should try to see him in all beings and serve every creature as the guru or the God Himself. One who can truly regard the guru as the God Himself – indeed becomes capable of unquestioning surrender to him. The very day self-surrender of this kind becomes complete the man (disciple) approaches the state of self-realization. If this doesn't take place, you will understand that one has not been able to realize the divinity of the guru, and that there has not been real self-surrender.

Q: How can one practice in real life surrender (śaraṇāgati) to the Divine?

A: Constantly keep this idea in the mind – 'I am His servant'. If the dāsya-bhāva is there, there will be no self-sense – like 'I' and 'mine'; laziness will have no place in your life. 'He is the real agent (kartā) – firmly hold on to this idea. Try constantly to think that you have become His own; this will lead gradually to progressive diminution of egoism. You must wholly subordinate yourself in Him. The world belongs to Him; therefore do everything as service to Him. If you perform every work of this world in a spirit of service to the Divine, your work will be regarded as worship of God.

When every work of this world will be regarded as the Lord's work then and then alone will your spirit attain maturity. Then there will be no fear of a fall. In whatever task - and whenever – God involves you it must be performed by you with pleasure, otherwise your heart will become restless. Whenever you do some work you must do it gladly, keeping an inward state of grace – this is essential. One should never remain discontented. There is a saying : asantuṣṭā dvijā naṣṭāḥ (brāhmaṇas are lost through discontent). Whatever state the Lord keeps you in is for your spiritual well-being – don't forget this. Come what may – you must do your work in the

midst of it in a spirit of service to the Divine and with joy. In proportion as this attitude develops one's mind becomes tranquil. Do you understand what is really good for you? Whatever He dispenses, in relation to you, for your spiritual benefit should be accepted with a glad heart; in this way He becomes pleased, (and very soon. Doesn't He understand what is really good for you better than yourself? Is He less wise than you? Remember these words of the Lord: sarvabhūtānām jñātvā mām śāntimṛcchati (knowing Me as the friend of all beings one attains peace.)

Serving all creatures as divine and chanting the name of the Divine, which you have received from the mouth of the guru – practice this in all conditions; this alone will purify your mind; and in the degree your mind becomes pure your sense of a separate agent withers away. Always try to destroy the 'I', the ego-sense. 'I have no power of my own; it is the Lord who is getting things done by me by instilling His power in me. He is the player of this instrument and I am the instrument He plays on'– hold firmly to this idea.

You are the servant; your wife, son, daughter, even your servants are His embodiments; in these forms it is He who is accepting a little from you. According to the kind of service He wishes to receive, He takes upon Himself all sorts of physical ailments etc. The money you earn for the service of your wife and children and other relatives – even that should be regarded as being sent to you for the service of the Lord. Even the things that you do to serve yourself – bathing and eating and so on – should be done in a spirit of service to the Lord. 'He is dwelling in this bodily abode; so, this dwelling house of the Divine should be carefully maintained and kept clean and pure' – this should be your attitude. You should even give up the idea that your body is your own.

God is the lord of the universe Who controls everything; every act is being performed through Him; He is the real agent. He even controls our minds. No one can understand why, when and how He gets something done by somebody. The Kauśitakī Upaniṣad declares:

eṣa eva sādhu karma kārayati,
tam yamebhyo lokebhya unninīṣate;
eṣa hyeva asādhu karma kārayati;
taṃ yamebhyo lokebhyodho ninīṣate.

- He makes the man whom He wants to take to higher realms (from the world), do good deeds; again, He makes whom He wants to lead to the nether worlds perform evil deeds. It follows therefore that it is sheer egoism (ahaṃkāra) to think
that 'I am the doer of my acts'. Not only that; it is utter ignorance to think that somebody else is treating you well or ill.

If you can keep in mind that whatever is done by anybody is really impelled by God and take it calmly with an unperturbed mind, you will attain peace. Knowing that everything, every act is ultimately ordained by God, wait for what is going to happen in its proper time, with a quiet and unruffled mind. If one can firmly believe that God is the real agent of all acts, good or bad, one can get rid of restlessness of the mind and thus become capable of surrender to the Divine.

Q: How is one to establish oneself in the spiritual state in which one can look upon everything and every creature as Brahman?

A: He who knows that God is everywhere and present in everything must treat everybody with reverence and respect; he never treats anybody with arrogance and pride. He is firmly convinced that just as He is present in a divine image so is He in the body of every being (jīva). How can a person so convinced become proud and arrogant? He cannot be gentle and humble towards everybody. The sādhaka (spiritual aspirant) must be so disposed that he will feel humility and bhakti not only in front of the divine image but also and equally, in the presence of all beings in whom He should try to see the Divine. Thus, gradually, his heart will naturally be filled with devotion (bhakti) and humility.

Finding faults in others as a rule leads to contempt or ill-will; this fault-finding captious attitude automatically disappears as a result, the censorious attitude towards others ceases and is

replaced by the feeling of respect and reverence towards everybody. Trying thus always to see and feel the divine presence everywhere and in every being, the heart of the sādhaka becomes cleansed of all impurities like anger and desire and, finally, freed from both attachment and aversion (rāga-dveṣa) which are essentially due to a sense of dualism.

You have no separate existence; you and I and everybody else is only a part of a Being who is one and indivisible. The sense of separateness arises from the fact that our bodies are different; hence come all our feelings of malice and hatred (and uncharitable-ness). But, for one who realizes that the one Paramātman (Supreme Self), the ultimate Cause of every cause, is present in every being – can such feeling of ill-will and hatred ever exist (for, these feelings ultimately spring from egoism).

Q: For us, who are ordinary house-holders involved in saṃsāra is it ever possible to be established in the state of mind in which every creature, every object, is looked upon as divine?

A: Remember that He is everywhere and you are His servant and whatever you do is the work of sevaka (servant). Just as a maid serves the sons and daughters of her master whole-heartedly but without attachment to anybody so should you serve all the members of your household including the servants and maids. If you can keep in mind this one thing, all egoism, all worldly desires, all ill-will and anger will disappear. Even when you chastise your servants you should do so in a spirit of service.

Our way, our sādhana is – to try to feel the divine existence in all and to live as a servant of all, free from all sense of egoism. If we can cultivate thoroughly and firmly this attitude of a servant of the Divine in all one becomes himself divine. You should maintain this attitude of the servant when you deal with others. When you are talking, for instance, with others you should do so with an inward conviction that you are talking with God Himself.

In reality, apart from the Divine there is nothing; you should always try to confirm the habit of regarding everything as Brahman – 'sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma' (All this is Brahman). You worship a metal or stone image, for instance, believing it to be the Divine Himself; if this is so,

why shouldn't you be able to regard human beings as God? One should adopt this attitude even towards wicked people, and serve them. On one who acts in this spirit divine grace comes down. The Divine gradually unfolds Himself within Him, and as a result you will increasingly realize the Divine everywhere, both within you and outside.

Firmly established in the knowledge that the Divine is present everywhere if you perform all acts in a spirit of service to God you will achieve more than through the practice of japa. If you can firmly hold on to this conviction you will not need to perform any other form of sādhana. As a result of this realization of the omnipresence of the Divine the mind becomes pure and attains spiritual enlightenment. This state of the soul is known as 'prajñābhūmi' (the plane of spiritual illumination).

You can call this sādhana easy if you like; you can also, and equally call it difficult. When He is everywhere, in every object, how can you worship God in isolation from the universe? If He is all – whom shall I reject? If you want to love Him you must love everything, every being that belongs to Him.

This is why I tell you our spiritual path lies under the feet of everybody; one must be absolutely free from egoism (self-sense). To look upon every object, every creature as divine – that is our sole sādhana. The Śruti declares – "sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma" (all this is Brahman), this being so you too – the sādhaka – an integral portion (aṃśa) of Brahman, and therefore, entirely under His control.

Q : Maharaj! 'nāma' has become distasteful to me of late. I don't feel any wish to do nāma; and I don't like to force myself to do it. What will befall me Maharaj? I pray for your grace.

A: You ask me what will happen to you? The answer is: if you don't perform nāma-japa, you will remain just as you are. The principle of tamas has become predominant in you; It is this laziness which comes from tamas that has overcome you and made you lethargic. Perform nāma as much as you can; do it even if you feel disinclined (by applying) through an effort of will. The only way to get rid of distaste for it and tāmasa laziness is to persist in performing nāma unremittingly. If you give up nāma and allow yourself to drift, and indulge in tāmasa inertia

you will achieve nothing. Do you intend to spend your life thus, wholly overcome by tamas? Arouse rajas (the principle of activity) within you, exhort your mind persistently to perform nāma (japa), persevere firmly, and then see whether your distaste still exists.

You won't do anything, only keep repeating – 'be kind to me, be gracious to me'. What is there in you that will elicit my grace? Are you doing anything that will induce me that way? Being gracious – is that something one can be forced into? Grace descends only to one who deserves it, and it does so spontaneously; it never comes to one who is unfit to receive it. Divine grace and kindness descend only on those who are exerting themselves to the utmost and yet are unable to raise themselves (spiritually); sincere effort of this kind arouses divine grace; it is God Himself who lifts him up.

You are only saying – 'be gracious, be kind'; but what have you been doing to deserve kṛpā (grace)? Giving yourself over to your natural tendencies you are only drifting and indulging in idle chatter and gossip; you have no firmness of mind and you are always drawn by people full of evil propensities. How do you pass your time I wonder, throughout the day. Can't you repeat the nāma four or five thousand times a day? If you don't perform japa (nāma) how will the secret channel open within you? What can I do after all, if you will do nothing? Perform japa as much as you can, everything will be achieved through that alone.

Q: What is that special quality that entitles one to receive divine grace?

A: It comes to one who is simple, sincere, one in mind and speech. God loves sincere devotion – absolutely sincere and free from pretense. Divine grace remains far away from one whose mind is tortuous. God forgives even a serious lapse in a bhakta if he is really sincere; on the contrary, even the possession of many virtues fail to endear oneself to God if one is insincere. Therefore try whole-heartedly to rid your mind of all turns and twists; God will confer grace; He doesn't allow a bhakta to suffer any want if he is simple and sincere. People often mocks at simplicity which they regard as stupidity. Let them do so. Don't live in the mouths of others; it is not enough to be popular; one must be dear to God; if one is dear to God, one must be dear to all. God is seated in every being, one who is so dear to God is dear to all (loved by

all). You should therefore try first to endear yourself to God. You should not however, in order to be beloved of God make yourself unpleasant to others, if you can help it. It is only one who has simple faith deserves divine grace which flows freely towards one who is a simple, sincere believer. Try to be always and in every respect sincere, free from pretense and hypocrisy. If, in spite of repeated failures, you don't give in but intensify your efforts you will attract the notice, you will see, of the ṛṣis; for, the ṛṣis always take kindly to those who try their utmost; they lift them up and crown their efforts with success. If the vessel is kept upside down it cannot hold divine grace (kṛpā), it flows out.

God never does anything violating Law; He does everything in accordance with Law. As a rule He gives fruits to a man according to the nature of his acts; otherwise He would be guilty of partiality. When the calf approaches the cow milk starts flowing from her udder. It doesn't flow if it is not her own calf but some other creature. The same is the case with what is called special grace from the Divine; it always comes to a deserving person and not to others.

Q: How can we attain to God and achieve liberation? Is it possible to attain Him through karma alone?

A: He alone can know Him to whom God through His grace reveals His true nature. The Upaniṣads declare: "He (the Ātman) can be attained by him whom He accepts." The vision of God (knowledge of the Ātman) is not the result of any act (karma). Desire-less karma leads to purification of the mind – which means that 'rajas' and 'tamas' then cease to dominate the mind, sattva alone takes full possession of the mind. This state of complete purity of the mind is characterized by the fact that the sādhaka then becomes free from self-sense (ahaṃkāra) and becomes equal-minded to all; the mind-stuff (citta) itself becomes blissfully serene and void of all attachment to objects of sense enjoyment. When the mind attains this state of complete purity the heart of the sādhaka becomes filled with spontaneous and intense love for the Divine. This is called 'parā-bhakti' (supreme devotion). To the sādhaka who has attained parā-bhakti God graciously reveals His own Self, His true nature. The sādhaka then attains to full knowledge of God in His essential nature and then, finally, becomes merged in Him (enters His Being). This is called mokṣa (liberation). This final and supreme liberation takes place only after

death. When man attains this supreme liberation (mokṣa) all his sorrows and sufferings come to an end and his state of bliss (ānanda) remains eternally immutable – unruffled and unchanged.

The sādhaka who has become free from all attachment to sense objects, whose mind has become fully controlled and one-pointed, should, in accordance with his own nature and instruction from his guru, concentrate his mind on the Divine and take to the path of samādhi. Samādhi is the last stage of Yoga. Through it, the mind of the sādhaka becomes completely void of all thoughts about sense-objects; it becomes free from all self-sense (ego) and expands, assuming the all-pervasiveness of space (ākāśa). The sādhaka then sees the entire cosmos within himself. Hence, gradually he becomes equal-minded, equal to all creature and finally attains parā-bhakti which leads, through Brahman-knowledge to mokṣa.
Those whose mind have not become fully one-pointed in this way – they too - when they become non-attached to objects of desire should, resort to meditation on the Divine little by little, increase the duration of meditation. When, with regular practice the mind becomes fully one-pointed, the outward tendencies of the mind will stop and it will become serene. When this happens they too will gradually attain the state of samādhi.

Those whose minds are not at all under control, who cannot, after withdrawing their minds totally from objects of desire, concentrate on the Divine even for a short while – for such the best thing is to take to the path of service to the divine (sevā). It should be noted here that even among those whose minds are under control and capable of concentration, many, instead of following the path of samādhi take to this path of divine service.

Sādhakas of both categories perform all acts in the spirit of service to the Divine. Nourishing their bodies with food – even this is done by them for service to God. The physical body is the chief instrument of service to God; to keep it active therefore is regarded by them as divine service.

When through service of this kind one's mind becomes firmly fixed on Him, his worldly desires all vanish; his mind is then drawn only by thoughts on the Divine and nothing else. As a part of divine worship everybody has to do some japa and dhyāna (meditation). In this state therefore

many among the sādhakas become drawn more and more to meditation and hence devote themselves to the path of Samādhi; all other activities (in the form of service) are then naturally abandoned. There are some others, however, who can keep themselves so deeply absorbed in meditation on the nature of the Divine even in the midst of all sorts of acts of service that through the grace of God the knots of their heart loosen and thus they become free from ego-sense and even-minded and then, finally, attain parā-bhakti.

For those who are unable thus even to serve and worship God in His divine image should cultivate the habit of performing their own duties and works without desire for the fruit. Whether or not a particular karma is in accordance with the śāstras – one should give up considerations of this kind and perform whatever karma one has to do without desire for the fruit (of action); this alone will lead to his spiritual well-being. If you ask: 'how is one to perform work (karma) without desire for the fruit' – the answer is this.

Preserving one's own body, looking after one's own people (who belong to one's household) and serving all living creatures as far as possible – this is, according to the śāstras, obligatory for all. "This is my bounden duty", one should tell oneself, for this I must do whatever karma is necessary – like earning money; I must, for this purpose, try my utmost, and yet realize all the time that the fruits of my efforts are not in my hands, that they are entirely taken care of by God and wholly determined by the Divine Providence. Vaiṣṇava householders should engage themselves in karma in this spirit – for the pleasure of God, to carry out His command. Karma performed in this manner is to be regarded as a form of divine worship. Performing all karma in this manner one's mind becomes purified; the senses begin to come under control and thus one's buddhi (higher intelligence) becomes so subtle and pure that the sādhaka gradually begins to perceive that even the ability to perform karma is not his own; it flows from God and that even he himself is not a separate entity but indissolubly bound up with the universe.

Thus realizing that God is the prime mover of every action, the sādhaka gives up the idea of being the doer of his own actions. This is what is meant by the surrender of all work (karma) to Brahman. When he thus, after offering all karma to Brahman, becomes non-attached, the mind of the sādhaka ceases to be drawn towards external objects; it comes fully under his control. At

this stage, being free from all attachments, the sādhaka becomes capable of adopting Samādhi. Some others may also, as many vaiṣṇavas do, give up all other karma and take up service to and worship of God. Whatever path he may follow, the sādhaka finally becomes free from all sense of egoism and attains serene contentment and equal minded-ness and becomes blessed, finally attaining par-ābhakti. There are some who, performing all karma without attachment, straightaway attain equal minded-ness (samadarśana) through divine grace and finally achieves parā-bhakti.

If, however, without understanding one's own competency or capacity, one, thinking that a particular form of spiritual effort (sādhana) – the path of meditation and Samādhi, for instance – is the best, hastens to adopt it, will not be successful. His success will be delayed, for he will never be able to practice higher spiritual exercises (like dhyāna and Samādhi); instead, the time he will devote to such higher spiritual exercises will be wasted; on the other hand, he will be reluctant to perform the kind of karma that is really congenial to his nature, since he disdains it. Unable therefore to follow either of the two paths he will drift like a boat without a boatman at the helm to steer it. It follows therefore that devoted performance of the sādhana even of a lower order but really congenial to one's own temperament and capability will lead to purification of the mind after which, he will be, after gradual progress, able to adopt the sādhana of a higher order.

Q: Is the path of bhakti (bhakti-mārga) worship of saguṇa Brahman (Brahman with attributes)?

A: No, it is not right to explain bhakti-mārga as worship of saguṇa Brahman. The path of bhakti in its entirety has three constituent elements. To look at the world around as Brahman is the first part of it; to look upon the jīva (the individual soul) as Brahman is its second part; and, finally, to contemplate Brahman as transcending both the world and the soul (jīva) as omniscient, competent, and the ultimate Ground of all Existence in which Brahman is pure bliss (ānanda) – this is the third part (aspect). Through the practice of the first two parts of it the mind of the sādhaka becomes completely pure; through the practice of the third part of it, the

sādhaka attains Brahman realization. To the bhakta therefore, Brahman is both saguṇa and nirguṇa (devoid of attributes).

Nothing in this world is constituted of guṇas (natural qualities) alone. The guṇas cannot subsist in isolation from Brahman; for the independent existence of guṇas is denied in Vedanta. Hence it is that the bhakta, whatever object he contemplates, becomes naturally filled with love towards it, for, in his eyes it is the manifestation of Brahman. When his mind thus, being free from all sense of dualism and all feeling of ill-will towards any creature, becomes pure, there arises a state of total devotion towards the Supreme Brahman.

This is what the śāstras describe as parā-bhakti; and it is through this parā-bhakti that the Supreme Brahman is realized. In the Brahma-sūtras, VedaVyāsa has clearly mentioned this threefold spiritual path as the means of achieving liberation (mokṣa). [Brahmasūtra : 1:1:32]

Q: What is the definition of bhakti?

A: In Bhakti-śāstras (sacred texts on bhakti) bhakti has been described as of two kinds : sādhana bhakti and parā-bhakti. Sādhana-bhakti consists of worship of God, meditation on Him, and so on. It is characterized by love, respect and feeling of attraction towards Him. In Sādhana-bhakti this love and attraction felt towards the Divine has a low degree of intensity; it is bhakti mixed with jñāna (knowledge). In the degree to which knowledge of the nature of the Divine is deepened through meditation, love and attraction for Him increase. At last, when through intensity of concentration on the Divine the self-sense of the meditator is totally obliterated, all sense of a separate existence disappears. This is the 'brahma-bhūta' state. It is in this state that parā-bhakti rises. This parā-bhakti is the only way to attain Brahman; there is no other way. (For, buddhi cannot transcend its own nature and reach Para-brahman).

Q: How far then can the path of knowledge take us?

A: Meditation is done by the buddhi; so, it is directed, as its highest object, towards that Person who resides in buddhi; Buddhi, which is the instrument of meditation, cannot transcend itself and reach the Supreme Brahman.

The Great Person (Puruṣa) who is establishing in buddhi is mentioned as Hiraṇyagarbha in the śāstras. The term Brahman is used in the śāstras chiefly in two senses : Para-brahman and Kārya-brahman (the Supreme Brahman and Brahman as manifested in the Cosmos). (Besides, Brahman also means the Vedas). Kārya-brahman is Brahman dwelling in buddhi; Hiraṇyagarbha is His other name. Jñāna is essentially a function of sattva-guṇa which is the same as pure Intelligence (buddhi). It follows therefore that the state of being one with Hiraṇyagarbha, that is, Brahman as the Person residing in buddhi, is the consummation of knowledge (jñāna). It is the highest state of jñāna beyond which it cannot go (reach); it is the final stage of jñānayoga. In śloka fifty of the eighteenth chapter of the Bhagavad-gītā this state of Brahma-bhūta, (being one with Brahman) has been referred to as the consummation (nīṣṭhā jñānasya yā parā). The sādhaka who has attained this state, experiences the Paramātman as beyond Prakṛti which begins with Buddhi and ends in Matter. In the case of the sādhaka who follows the Saṃkhya path this spiritual state has been described by Vyāsa (the great commentator on Yoga-sūtras of Patanjali) as the state of knowledge in which the Ātman is experienced as an entity which is separate from sattva-guṇa (which is the essence of jñāna or buddhi). But even then, the sādhaka has no clear, direct knowledge of the nature of the Ātman or Puruṣa, the real Self.

Q: How does bhakti arise? How is bhakti related to jñāna?

A: Even in the world it is seen that when one regards a person as great one's heart is naturally filled with love and devotion towards him; on the contrary, it is never seen that one is convinced that somebody is great and yet does not feel attracted towards him, experience love and attraction towards him. If there is no sense of love and devotion (bhakti) towards the great, the sense of greatness must be absent – it is not really felt but something one has merely heard

about; there cannot be, in such a case any true appreciation of greatness of the person concerned. When this is so in our ordinary life, then it is impossible that one should not feel bhakti towards the Divine with the realization of the greatness of the Creator and the Sustainer, the director and the controller of the universe. If bhakti does not arise, it is clear that one has no real conception of how much knowledge and power one needed to create and to sustain this universe – that one really hasn't got any idea of the greatness of the Creator and Sustainer of the Cosmos.

Q: What is bhakti?

A: If a person (or an object) is naturally beautiful and pleasant he or she (or it) attracts the spectator and the latter feels an attachment towards him or her (or it). Now, if this lovely and pleasant object is also endowed with noble qualities then the emotion that is aroused in the heart of the spectator towards it is something more than mere attachment or admiration; it is (then called) bhakti.

In bhakti, therefore, along with a sense of beauty and comeliness there is also a definite sense of greatness. Herein lies the difference between anurāga (attachment, love) and bhakti. Nevertheless, though (anurāga and) bhakti always accompanies knowledge – the noble qualities of the object of contemplation; though, in other words, the absence of anurāga and bhakti implies a definite lack of a sense of beauty and greatness it is not knowledge alone; for, bhakti essentially signifies an intense longing to be united with the object of knowledge; it signifies a movement of the heart. Bhakti is a manifestation of that Power (śakti) that unites the heart (the soul) with God – the object of knowledge. The manifestation of this Power is not so intense as long as the knowledge of the attributes of the Divine becomes fully developed; until then, in order to develop this sense (knowledge) of divine attributes one needs to perform the appropriate karma. Bhakti, at this stage, is called sādhana-bhakti. When, finally, the heart is established in pure knowledge (pure sattva), the ego-sense disappears and the sādhaka attains at this stage, full knowledge of the manifested Brahman (Kārya-Brahman). When this happens, the yearning of the soul towards the Divine (in His transcendent and essential nature) reaches the utmost point of intensity. Bhakti at this stage is called 'Parā-bhakti'.

Q: It appears that in the Bhagavad-gītā the Divine Lord singles out the jñānin for a special praise (Chapter VII, sloka -17)

teṣāṃ jñānī nityayukta ekabhaktirviśiṣyate

priyo hi jñānino'tyarthamahaṃ sa ca mama priyaḥ.

- Noble are all those without exception, but I hold the knower as my very Self, for he, the soul in union, accepts Me as his highest goal.

Here, in these verses the Lord exalts the jñānin. In that case, what about bhakti.....

A: (Before the question is completed) Read the definition of jñāna in the thirteenth Chapter of the Gītā (the verses referred to – XIII/7 to XIII/11 – are read out along with the Bengali translation). So you see jñāna "includes" 'avyabhicārinī bhakti' (unswerving devotion). If there is no single-minded devotion, there is, the Lord says, no knowledge either.

As a matter of fact, here the term jñāna has not been used in the sense in which you are using it. But then, it is not possible to understand this by reading one or two "isolated" ślokas. It is no doubt true that jñāna of the Sāṃkhyas does not recognize bhakti; but that is another matter. Here we are concerned with Vedantic knowledge (jñāna), and in Vedanta there is no contradiction between jñāna and bhakti; indeed the jñāna that does not recognize bhakti is not Vedantic jñāna. In the Bhagavadgītā, we have this Vedantic jñāna which is perfectly compatible with bhakti. It should be noted that the jñānī who has been praised in the above verses (VII/16 to VII/18) is not a follower of the path of Knowledge of the Sāṃkhyas but of Vedanta. This is why the Lord uses the verb 'bhajante' ('love and adore Me'). The jñānī of the Sāṃkhya type has nothing to do with bhajana; he doesn't worship and adore the Divine. As for bhakti, he totally repudiates it. In the śloka in question (VII/17 and VII/18) bhakti is mentioned, but as jñāna is the subject, there is no special emphasis on bhakti for the simple reason that in the Gītā, jñāna always presupposes single-minded devotion – avyabhicārinī bhakti.

As a matter of fact the verb "bhajante" itself clearly suggests bhakti; for "bhajana" and "bhakti" mean much the same thing; they are derived from the same verbal root "bhaj" (bhaj + anaṭ = bhajana; bhaj + kti = bhakti) Where there is no bhakti, there is no jñāna either; for, if there is a

real conviction that some object is great bhakti will follow inevitably; it cannot be otherwise. Knowledge of greatness is always accompanied by bhakti. And who is greater than God? If one has a sense of the Divine and yet no feeling of bhakti it must be understood that there is no real knowledge of greatness; it's empty verbiage, mere parrot like repetition of words, not the real thing. This is why, in the famous definition of jñāna in the thirteenth Chapter of the Gītā, bhakti, unswerving bhakti has been mentioned as an inalienable element of knowledge.

Q: Nobody engages in any act without desire for the fruit of action. How is then 'niṣkāma karma' of the Gītā at all possible?

A: Let me tell you how one is to act without a desire for the fruit of the action. To preserve one's body, to take care of one's dependents and, generally, to serve all creatures as far as possible – this, according to our divine śāstras, is the common duty of all. "All this is my bounden duty; to fulfill this duty earning money is necessary; this is why I am doing work as my duty. In trying to do this I must exert myself to the utmost; but the result of my efforts in this direction is not in my hands, it is ordained by the Divine Lord; it is under His dispensation.

As I have said before, niṣkāma karma leads to purification of the mind. For us, vaiṣṇavas, worship of God and work in the spirit of service – this is niṣkāma karma. When, the sādhaka does nothing in order to gratify his senses, when he does everything only for service to the Divine and His worship, when the one aim of his life is to please God – then and then only his karma can be called niṣkāma karma.

Q: What is karma-yoga? Why is it so important for all of us?

A: To keep ourselves alive we must do acts necessary for this purpose. One cannot give up eating, for example; and eating, like every act produces bhoga (experience of enjoyment); and like all bhogas it automatically gives rise to appropriate impressions ('bhoga saṃskāras). Since bhoga-producing karma is unavoidable, it is necessary to adopt ways so that even when bhoga is present, bhoga saṃskāras are not generated and thus desire for bhoga is not

increased. It is in order to suggest the means to it that the Divine Lord has instructed us Karma-yoga.

This Karma-yoga has two stages: at the first stage of Karma-yoga one performs all work without attachment and desire for the fruits of action; his only motive is to please God, to carry out what the śāstras, expressing the command of God, has enjoined. Performing all karma in this way gradually leads to the disappearance of all desire for sense enjoyments; the sādhaka ceases to act to gratify his senses. Consequently, though there is bhoga as an inevitable concomitant of karma it does not generate impressions associated with bhoga (bhoga saṃskāras). When thus the bhoga impressions become weakened the senses become restrained. It is these saṃskāras of bhoga (impressions of past enjoyments) which impel the senses towards objects of enjoyment; consequently, when those saṃskāras become weakened the natural outward-tending impulses become restrained; so that, the restlessness of the mind disappears with the result that it (mind) becomes ready for samādhi.

When the mind of the sādhaka attains such a degree of purity he realizes that God alone is the impelling force behind all mental activities, that even his power to eat is not his own; that he has, as a matter of fact, absolutely no control over the emergence and disappearance of that power; it is God who impels and controls it. With this realization, therefore, his sense of being the doer of his actions begins to diminish fast. It is indeed karma which gives rise to this sense of the doer which leads to the ego-sense – it is the ultimate basis of the ego-sense (ahaṃ-buddhi). Consequently, with the gradual realization that when all karma is really performed by God, the ego-sense of the sādhaka begins to disappear; as a result, the mind begins to expand. At this stage, even while doing (all) karma the sādhaka feels that he himself is not really doing anything; it is divine power (aiśī-śakti) which is directing his senses and impelling them to action; he himself is doing nothing. Performing all acts thus, without the sense of being the doer – this is the second stage of karma-yoga. When one becomes firmly established in this condition there is nothing which distracts one's mind. It is then and then alone that the sādhaka becomes capable of adopting the higher yoga.

Q: What is the meaning of the term 'yoga'?

A: Yoga really means samādhi. When the sādhaka becomes so absorbed in meditation (dhyāna) that his mind becomes completely merged in the object (of meditation), when, that is to say, he totally forgets that he is meditating, when even the memory of himself vanishes – this state of mind is called samādhi; and when, further, the mind, after being withdrawn from all external objects, is drawn more and more inwards and then becomes, finally, void of all extêrnal consciousness (outward tending activity), when no object of thought is present in the mind, when there is no knowledge of any object and thus, being totally devoid of any activity (or function) it remains poised in its own essential nature (svarūpa) – this state of the mind is the culmination of yoga. As nothing in this state of the mind exists as the object of knowledge, it is called 'asamprajñāta samādhi'. At this stage the mind (citta) remains in the state of sāttvika bliss which is the essential nature of it (buddhi). It is when this state is attained that the highest bhakti appears (possesses the mind). The emergence of this parā-bhakti is independent of any effort by the sādhaka, it is spontaneous. When this parā-bhakti arises the Divine graciously reveals Himself in His essential nature to the bhakta.

Q: I would like very much to know the stages of spiritual progress according to the Bhagavadgītā. Would you kindly tell me?

A: The stages, in an ascending order of spiritual progress are as follows.

(1) Ordinary people, that is those who are driven by desires of all sorts (sakāma), should perform all acts as prescribed in the śāstras.

(2) As a result of doing karma as enjoined by the śāstras one's mind will attain relative purity (will become purer and purer). He will then be able to perform all acts without attachment (that is, without being attached not only to the fruits of his action but to the act itself); he will do everything driven by the sense of duty (He will think thus: 'God Himself has directed us through the śāstras what we should do; so I must follow these injunctions to please Him'.); consequently, all his actions will be free from the ego-

sense, for he will feel that all karma is ultimately impelled by the Great Controller of the Universe. Performing all acts in this manner (spirit) is called karma-yoga.

(3) Through the practice of karma in this way one becomes perfected in karma-yoga. It is at this stage that the sādhaka really gets started along the road of yoga (yoga-mārga). He will then be in a position to give up all karma (enjoined by the śāstras), withdraw from the world and devote himself entirely to meditation on Brahman in solitude.

(4) As a result of such (intense and sustained) meditation he will realize that he is one with Brahman. Through this realization he will become one with Brahman (brahmabhūyāya kalpate).

When the sādhaka thus becomes established in this state of identity with (manifested) Brahman he attains the culmination of Yoga. At this stage (of perfection in Yoga) even the act of meditation ceases. The stages that the sādhaka then gradually attains have been thus described in the Bhagavadgītā:

brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā na śocati na kāṃkṣati
samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu madbhaktiṃ labhate parām (XIII/54)

bhaktyā māṃ abhijānāti yāvān yaścāsmi tattvataḥ
tato māṃ tattvato jñātvā viśate tadanantaram. (XIII/55)

- When one thus becomes one with (manifested) Brahman and thus established in Him, his mind becomes blissfully serene; he has nothing to regret and all desires for earthly enjoyments disappear. He becomes equal-minded to all creatures. It is at this stage that he attains the Supreme Bhakti towards Me. It is through this Supreme (parā) bhakti that he fully realizes My real nature (as Para-brahman). After thus attaining full knowledge of Myself (as Para-brahman) he enters into Me.

Q: Why is humility so important?

A: He dwells in every being. So, the road that leads to Him lies under the feet of all creatures. How can we worship Him as an entity separate from the universe? Who shall I neglect or ignore? The road to Him, I repeat, lies along the feet of all. In order to perform this sādhana one must be free from the slightest trace of egoism. He is all – so whom shall I hate or dislike? If you love somebody you must also love everybody who is dear to Him. This is the sādhana that has to be done; in this spiritual effort (sādhana), however, some will succeed, others will not.

Q: What are the chief obstacles to sādhana?

A: The chief obstacles are two: egoism (self-sense) and finding faults in others. What is the basis of self-sense – karma. It is the sense of "I am the doer" that really fosters our ego-sense. To be freed from this you must ask yourself: 'Is my karma within my control. Is it wholly dependent upon my will?

There are some 'voluntary actions', that is, actions which we think we do ourselves. What we mean to say is that we do these actions we wish to. Now tell me – is the 'wish' under your control? Is your wish something you can have for the wishing? The truth is that every wish has a cause, a cause which lies outside you. Your wish is not uncaused; nothing, as a matter of fact is without a cause; your wish is no exception. Now, is cause of your wish governed by you? That which arouses your wish, the 'incentive' to it, is not under your control. The 'incentive cause' therefore lies beyond you. The 'cause' of that 'cause' lies beyond your jurisdiction.

Remember – you are not a separate entity, that you are the 'part and parcel' of a big 'machinery'. Ponder this matter carefully and deeply. If you begin to reflect along this line you will cease to harbour malice towards anybody.

Reflecting over the matter in this manner the sense of 'I am the doer' will diminish; and in the degree to which this sense diminishes, so will your egoism. If you know that all action ultimately

springs from a single Source, where will be your ego? The more you realize that God is the One Governor of the Universe the less will be your ego-sense and, as a consequence the more serene your mind.

Whatever one can conceive or imagine springs from Him; what is needed is to feel the presence everywhere. To set up, mentally, the power of Viṣṇu in every being and to treat him thus – this is the vaiṣṇava par excellence.

His hand is everywhere – the thief as well as the rich man (who is despoiled). Whatever is conceivable is within Him.....

Freedom of will is 'meaningless nonsense'. Will can never be free. It is true that some of your actions are subject to your will; but this will is never free. 'Will is caused by something external' (to it).

Q: Baba! Is there then no such thing as puruṣakāra? (free will)?

A: The fruit does not come from the sky. Just as the fruit that will issue from a specific act is fixed, so is the act itself. God will get you to do only that which He intends to get done by you. That which appears as free will (puruṣakāra) has its cause (does anything, for that matter happens without a cause?). When an incentive cause, the result of your karma in your previous births, comes into effect, your puruṣakāra is called into play. You cannot do whatever you wish to or would like to. Remember – your wish is determined by your previous karma. You wished for instance, to come here and see me; but why did you feel this desire you do not know. Doesn't it prove that your wish is determined by another cause, and that your puruṣakāra has its origin elsewhere?

Just as the fruit of your karma (of previous births) will act as an incentive now, so, on the other hand, things will happen to arouse the incentive cause. Both are beyond your control. Although the fruit of action will accrue from your puruṣakāra, your puruṣakāra itself is determined by other causes. Puruṣakāra exists no doubt, but it is subject to another law. If propitiatory rights for the

planets bear fruits, it means that fruits are the results of your performance of these rights. If you notice violations of laws you should understand that these too were pre-determined.

Q: If everything is pre-ordained why should we practice japa or any other sādhana?

A: Do you really do anything? It is He who will make you do the sādhanā; you cannot but perform the japa. You are an integral part of Him. It may even so happen that He will make you do something that you regard as impure. In that case, it is He, again, who will cleanse you; He will, that is to say exhaust your karma through bhoga.

Suppose you are making an effort to perform bhajana, and yet, you are unable to concentrate your mind. Even this is the doing of the Divine. Then, one day suddenly the floodgates are opened and the rushing water will sweep you along.

The mind must be cleansed of all impurities. It is the saṃskāras which constitute these impurities. Until these saṃskāras are got rid of there cannot be the vision of God; freedom from all saṃskāras is essential for this vision. When the mind becomes absolutely pure the Divine reveals Himself. So long as the sense of duality persists, it will be impossible to acquire sāttvika nature. So long as one has the sense of 'good' or 'bad' one has rājasa nature. The jñāna Bhagavad-gītā speaks of, characterizes sāttvika as one which finds oneness everywhere, in all beings.

sarvabhūteṣu yenaikam bhāvamavyayamīkṣate (Gītā - XIII/20)

Rajas and tamas – both are impurities; one is the dynamic force that impels all activity, the other is sloth and inertia. One must transcend both in order to attain pure sattva. In that state of sāttvika purity one ceases to feel any attraction for anything. It is then and then only, that one feels real attraction for the Divine. Then, even when confronted with conflicts and differences the mind remains calm, unperturbed by attachment or aversion.

You are bound by all kinds of saṃskāras. To a real sādhaka the sense of distinction between good or bad is obliterated; he sees everywhere divine Līlā. When the whole universe is within

Him, an integral part of Him, what does it matter if He does something to one part through another? The saṃskāras are to be destroyed slowly, for they have been generated through innumerable births, and are not easy to get rid of.

My son! You will become pure only when you will rid yourself of all saṃskāras. It is hard to understand divine līlā. He urges the thief to steal and honest man to keep awake. Don't harbour ill-will towards anybody; this is what is meant by real purity of heart. So long as saṃskāras persist in all your acts you are impure. Every act gets done through His will; none is capable of doing anything, however little, by himself. Whatever anybody does he is made to do so by Him; nobody has the slightest power to do anything by himself.

To regard oneself as the real agent of one's acts and to attribute independent agency to any other person – this saṃskāra constitutes the essence of bondage. Unless you can transcend this deep-seated saṃskāra you will suffer. God, by killing the sinner, brings about his deliverance. Thus, the sinner is no further away from God than anybody else; none is alienated from Him, there is no question of any enmity between Him and His creature.

Q: To be free from all saṃskāras is indeed very difficult; the tendency to find faults in others is universal and inveterate. How is one to rid oneself of all saṃskāras?

A: The tendency towards fault-finding is the chief obstacle to mental purity; for the moment one finds faults in others, one's mind becomes tainted; as soon as you find faults in others, the defects you discover instantly defile yourself (pass into you). We apprehend external objects through various senses; like hearing and sight. The objects perceived through the senses are reflected in our buddhi (the higher intelligence); our buddhi, in other words assumes the forms of these objects; buddhi, that is to say, becomes one with these objects. The Ātman (the Self), Who is the detached spectator of buddhi sees it and feels something to be good or bad and so on. This is the essential method of perception of external objects. An elaborate analysis of this process can be found in Philosophy. So, you can see now how finding faults in others means becoming defiled with it oneself. It follows therefore that until you can be totally free from this defect of finding faults in others, no matter whether you are a learned person, an ascetic or a

person devoted to spiritual practices – the possibility of spiritual perfection will be a far cry. The divine Lord Himself, speaking about the man who has attained absolute equal-minded-ness towards all (sāmya) declares that the latter is firmly established in Brahman, and thus becomes as completely free from all defects as Brahman Himself. (nirdoṣaṃ hi samaṃ brahma tasmād brahmaṇi te sthitāḥ [Gītā V/19])

The more faultless you become the easier will it be for you to be absolutely spotless and pure. At last you will become so immaculate that it will be impossible for you to do something wrong or find faults in others. Indeed when purity becomes easy and natural, when one becomes incapable of fault-finding even in dreams, then and only then real flawlessness is attained. In order to attain this state of total flawlessness one must give up finding fault in others, condemning them in speech, thinking evil thoughts, evil company and evil ways. This is why one has to keep oneself always aloof from these and keep respectful distance. At the same time one should engage oneself in thinking about God and great saints and devotees; one should also perform action, which are flawless; one should, in other words do everything, established in a constant sense of the divine presence everywhere, in a spirit of service and without laziness and desire for comfort, living in this manner, performing all acts in this spirit gradually one's mind becomes pure; and when the mind attains this state of absolute purity and flawlessness then one becomes capable of perfection.

Speaking generally, if one sedulously cultivate this habit of not finding faults in others for twelve years cessation from captiousness becomes easy and natural. As a result of such practice, long and earnest, one becomes firmly established in spotless purity; when this happens, one generally goes beyond the confines of all rules and restrictions. Paramahaṃsa (saints of the highest order) are indeed beyond all injunctions and prohibitions; but this does not mean that one must connive at their actions even when they are wrong; what it really means is that it is impossible for them to do anything wrong. The truth is that their bodies and minds become so pure that whatever they do turns out to be holy and salutary; and all this is natural and spontaneous; their steps are never out of rhythm, so to speak, their body and mind become filled with blessings. They attain the very nature of the Divine. The Divine is free from all defects and deficiencies, all evil; He is the Supreme Self who is the ocean of all that is pure and good. If

anything that strikes you as wrong is done by them, it is, you should know for certain for a specific good of the world. The actions of great men are often difficult to understand; you should never try to emulate them; it is their words and teachings which you should follow. Nevertheless, those actions of theirs which are in consonance with their words, and with the teaching of the śāstras, that is in perfect accord with śāstric injunctions, you should try your best to follow.

Q: To be equal-minded towards all is (indeed) exceedingly difficult. Is it really possible to view an evil-doer as an embodiment of the Divine?

A: You know nothing about the universe. You have no right to judge through what agency anything gets done. Your concern should be your own action. You cleanse and scrub your left hand after relieving yourself – you regard this as thereby defiled; that is why you purify it yourself. And yet, for this defilement of your left hand your whole body doesn't become unclear. In a similar manner God makes one, in this world, do something which He wants him to do; and for his act He makes him suffer in order to purify him.

Judging what is good and what is bad – that is the real fault. That – judging qualities and defects – that is not your business. Perform your own duties and don't harbour malice towards anybody. You should however do whatever is required of you regarding a person, as, for instance, chastising your son when necessary. If somebody steals your belongings, it is your duty to lodge a complaint with the police authorities, but you should do it without any ill-will. You should do this because it is your duty to do so, not in the hope of recovering the object stolen. You must try to preserve whatever He has entrusted you with. Again, you have to go to your office. If you neglect your assigned work at the office on the ground that it is coming in the way of your bhajana you will be indulging in tāmasic mentality. Nevertheless, do whatever you have to in a spirit of duty. If, inspired by this spirit (of duty) the executioner does his assigned job (namely, execution) he will commit no wrong.

If you feel hostile towards a person you should meditate on him as an embodiment of God Himself and inwardly pray to him to forgive you and addressing him mentally you should say "under the influence of saṃskāra I have committed this grave offence of cherishing ill-will

towards you." Saying this mentally, you should ask to be pardoned. If you can do this even the deadliest of your enemies will turn into your earnest well-wisher.

He is doing everything. One the one hand, He will urge the thief to steal; on the other, He will warn the house-holder to be cautious. Keep doing your duties without desire for their fruits. God is engaged in the divine play; and you, too, should do your work in the same spirit of cosmic play. If you can do this, this saṃsāra will not be able to bind you. In a game of cards for instance, you will, inevitably, either lose or win; but even if you lose you should know that it is a part of the game.

Every act of jīva is His act, wholly His; every individual is His, every act is ultimately His own – to be firmly established in this conviction, to divert one's mind towards this central concept is one's prime duty. For one who can do this there is no other duty to be performed; he becomes blessed on all sides (in every way). If one can keep this in mind both good and bad, merits and demerits disappear. When a servant, for instance, does something wrong it is He who is doing so; and it is He again, who will tell you to punish him.

If you can maintain this equal-mindedness (samabuddhi) everywhere nothing can do you the least harm even if you are engaged in thousand activities and along with the cultivation of this attitude your bhajana will go on. This present epoch, Kali-yuga, is indeed blessed; for, in these degenerate times God becomes easily pleased and shows His grace.

Q: The Blessed Lord says in the Gītā : The sages are equal-minded towards the learned, and spiritually disciplined brāhmaṇa, the cow, the elephant, the dog and the social outcasts.

vidyā vinayasampanne brāhmaṇe gavi hastini,
śuni caiva svapāke ca paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ. (V/18)

Is it possible for an ordinary house-holder to be like this?

A: No, this is no easy matter – not only for the house-holder but also for the sannyāsin (fakir). For this, spiritual effort (sādhana) is needed; nothing can be achieved without sādhana. Remember God in every act of yours. Long and sustained effort will gradually lead to equal-minded-ness. When somebody offers you salutation (praṇāma) don't accept it as due to you for if you do so he (the person who salutes you) will draw out your force (śakti). At such times you should remember God and send the praṇāma to Him. You might have noticed that on such occasions the person who is offered praṇāma utters the word 'jay' – which means 'jay'(victory) to Gopalji (Lord Viṣṇu). Through this process you remember God and see Him within the person who bows to you.

This equality of vision should be extended even towards non-human beings like dogs. In the Bhāgavata it is said that one should prostrate before dogs and other animals, you should adopt the same attitude even towards snakes. The cultivation of this attitude towards all creature will gradually generate in you equality of vision (samadṛṣṭi).

It is He who reigns in every creature. Suppose you are a doctor, then while you treat your patients you should think that you are serving God Himself. Everything comes out right if one performs all acts in a spirit of service to the Divine. If one can imbibe this mental habit of regarding every object, every creature as Divine, equal-minded-ness will immediately result.

Q: Does the mind become calm and still when this equal-minded-ness towards all is achieved?

A: Yes, my son! Equal-minded-ness is not a matter of joke; it is exceedingly difficult. To speak about it is easy; really to achieve it is not so. Suppose, if somebody at this moment makes a biting remark to you, the extent of your equal-minded-ness will be readily seen; you will at once retort with a volley of stinging words. Does this indicate equal-minded-ness (samabhāva)? Do you remember how the other day you were frightened to death at seeing a snake? Why were you frightened? Wasn't He present within the snake?

Staying near the guru, serving him with devotion, living constantly in contact with the air that has touched his (the guru's) body, and finally, through the grace of the guru one attains equal-minded-ness. To carry the out the guru's commands and instructions – that too is a form of service to him. The road to samabhāva (equal-minded-ness) opens only through the grace of the guru, not otherwise. The disciple who hardly ever seeks the company of the guru or approaches him, who wanders about from place to place considering himself wise and knowing will come to nothing.

You try constantly to serve all creatures whole-heartedly with a firm conviction that the one Brahman is present in every object. When this conviction that He is present everywhere, in every creature, will become firmly established in your mind, and when in consequence (of this) you can mentally prostrate yourself at the feet of all creatures – then and then alone will the road to samabhāva will open to you. Don't notice the faults of others; this tendency to find faults springs from a sense of division and dualism (bheda). He dwells in every object and every creature and it is He who is doing everything. This being so, whose fault is it? Who is to blame? No person, no creature has either faults or merits, for all acts are His acts. Everybody lives and moves as he is made to do so by Him. Thinking along these lines, give up the habit of finding faults in others knowing that it is all His play try to remain content and rejoice in everything. Haven't you read in the Gītā: īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hṛddeśerjuna tiṣṭhati (God dwells in the hearts of all creatures). And remaining in the heart of every creature what does He do? – bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāṇi māyayā – which means: "through His Māyā-śakti (Divine Power) He is moving every creature like a puppet set in a machine (mechanical contrivance)." Who is to blame? Don't therefore notice the faults of others. But beware you should never engage yourself in doing evil on the pretext that He is making you do so. You should carefully and always notice your own faults and sincerely try to mend them.

Q: Sometimes we commit a wrong in spite of ourselves. Is that too done by God?

A: Nothing is really done by you; even that which you regard as a wrong act is something that He Himself is making you do. Only, He will make you suffer the consequence of your action in order to purify you. Take for instance the fact of your cleansing yourself with your left hand

(after evacuation) that is not a wrong act; nevertheless, supposing that to be an evil act, you rinse your left hand with earth and thus cleanse it.

What you consider a wrong act – even that He makes you do to serve another purpose. Nothing can be more unjust than Kaikeyī's sending Rama to the forest; but even that was brought about by the divine Providence – in order to punish the wrong-doer (Rāvaṇa). First, try to purify your actions, that is to say, make it a point to think – "I myself am doing nothing. I am just a puppet in your hand. I do nothing in reality" as the Gītā says: "naiva kiṃcit karomi".

Do as far as you are able to – that will suffice, then let His will prevail – I have no will of my own.

Q: Why does He make a person wicked and keeps him so?

A: That is His will. It is He who makes a man do what He wishes him to. It is not through goodness and virtue alone that the world is benefited but also through what is evil in the long run. Hence it is that in divine dispensation there is right as well as wrong, good as well as evil. No man can discern the consequences of an act as a whole; so, he grieves and laments.

Q: If this be so, there is nothing to be said against anyone.

A: Precisely; it is really so. But my son – this is too high an idea. A thief, for instance, will rob you of all your belongings and yet you will not raise your little finger, have nothing to say in protest; or, somebody comes and beats you up and yet you can't utter a word – if you can attain such a state then you enjoy abiding, imperturbable peace and contentment.

Q: I may not attain this ideal state of mind right now; nevertheless, I may at least try to do so; can't I?

A: (Pleased) Yes, quite so! This is precisely what is meant by sādhana. But at first (at the initial stage) God subjects those who take to this path (of the spirit) to test. (Remaining silent for a while) after all, this talk about testing and so on is a figment of imagination – nonsense. What

sort of test will He perform? The bhakta is not ripe at the initial stage; so, God takes him through all sorts of vicissitudes in order to establish him firmly in his sādhana.

Let me tell you one thing. Listen. What's the use of telling you this? However let me tell you (to himself). Once the upward rising kuṇḍalinī śakti was being obstructed within my chest while I was practicing Haṭha-yoga involving the six centres (through the suṣumnā). I told my gurudeva about this. He said: "yes, it is the lotus there which is obstructing the passage". (I hope you know what it means), don't you? He said in effect that it is the heart centre (or lotus) which is impeding the upward movement of the kuṇḍalinī. I said: "Kindly remove the obstacle Sir!" To this prayer of mine his reply was a sharp reprimand: "No, I won't". I was alarmed; I was also hurt. I thought within myself "I haven't said anything which deserves this rebuke." Later, he explained the matter to me, saying – "If I remove the obstacle right away it will render you unfit for all activities. God will make you do many things, perform many services; when the time comes the passage (through suṣumnā) will automatically open up.

Q: God is everything; He is doing everything and getting things done by everybody; no one has any independent power; even spiritual energy – sādhana śakti is obtained through His grace. How then, in what manner can one receive divine grace?

A: If one performs sincerely and devotedly what God Himself has urged through the śāstras and the Guru, one gets His grace. He bestows His grace on one who is trying his (or her) utmost. Grace is not showered without a cause; there must be some quality or merit in the person who gets it. On the other hand, Grace is being showered all the time in a continuous flow, without waiting or asking for anything. But if the vessel is turned upside down Grace just flows past. Where will it stand?

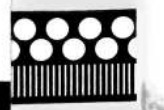
The basic need is firm faith in and implicit reliance on the Guru and His words. It is earnest dedication that attracts His grace. Nothing ever happened, happens or will happen against His wish. Whatever happened in the past, is happening now and will happen in future has already been settled by Him – it is all through His wish. This is the heart of the matter. Knowing this essential Truth, man should surrender himself to the Divine; this total self-surrender is what makes human life ultimately significant and blessed. Goswami Prabhu (Śrī VijayKṛṣṇa

Goswami) used to say : "I am like a used leaf-plate blown hither and thither during a storm." This is the state of complete ego-less-ness.

"I want bhakti this moment, and mukti without delay" – this sort of attitude won't do. There is no knowing when, how and to whom He does thing desired. He may bestow His grace on persons who are seemingly monstrous sinners – all on a sudden. By slaying demons He often bestowed a degree of grace that even many bhaktas seldom receive. He is not subject to anybody's will. Who can tell when and whom He is going to oblige with His grace? Your duty therefore to pray for grace constantly with calm and patience.

There is no hard and fast rule about His grace. Some may not get it even after a great deal of effort, which some others, it may so happen, obtain suddenly. It is all His "līlā". My Master (Śrī Śrī Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj) once told me the story of a bhakta. Listen. "Come", he said turning to me "I shall tell you the story of a bhakta. His name was Nona Bhagat. Seeing the village priest offer daily worship (puja) Nona, a good-natured, simple fellow, had a great desire to do the same. So approaching the priest he said one day "Please give me an idol; I shall worship him." The priest though: this fellow is an illiterate and an idiot. What does he know of ceremonial worship? But Nona was adamant and kept asking for an idol so pressingly that the priest had to do something to get rid of him. Handing Nona a stone pestle he said: "Take this – your thakur (desired idol) – worship Him". With great joy Nona (Bhagat) took it and brought it home. Seeing the pestle, Nona's Thakur, his wife burst into laughter. But Nona paid no heed to her taunts and started worshipping his Thakur in grim earnest. Offering Him bhoga (food) he would press, urge and finally importune his Thakur to eat it. He firmly believed that Thakur actually takes the food offered to Him. So, the more his Thakur delayed in eating the bhoga, the more insistent and piteous became his appeal. "Eat, please eat, the day is drawing to a close my Lord. Why don't you take anything ? Coaxingly, piteously he kept repeating these words. By virtue of his astonishingly simple faith and persistence he finally had a vision of his Thakur who actually partook of the bhoga.

Later, when Nona, met the priest, the latter asked him with amusement: "Ah! How are you getting on with your worship (pūjā)? Prostrating himself before the priest devoutly Nona replied:



" It is going on nicely Oh! You gave me such a beautiful Thakurji! He gave me some trouble at first, I must say; but that's no matter. He stubbornly refused to eat the food I offered Him; He gave me a lot of trouble, I must confess; in the end however, He took the food, without making any more fuss. "Good heavens! He has eaten your bhog! Did you say that"? "Yes Sir! He did, indeed!" "But He never does so with me!" How strange!" Nona exclaimed. "But He did take my bhog! Only at the initial stage He made some trouble, that's all." "Can you show me this – your Thakur eating your bhog," the priest asked. "Certainly", Nona replied.

On the following day the priest came to Nona's small room where he kept his Thakur. As usual, Thakur took (a portion of) the bhog. Nona saw it, but the priest didn't; but he could hear the jingling sound of the Thakur's (Lord Kṛṣṇa's) anklets. Exceedingly surprised, the priest was seized with remorse for having treated Nona with such contempt and derision and left the place. Nona, on the other hand, couldn't help feeling some pride at the fact that the priest failed to have a vision of the Lord while he got it in one day. Lovingly solicitous as He always is for His bhakta, the Thakur, in order to crush his pride took Nona with Him and entered a forest. Arriving at last at an utterly desolate place – upon a hill surrounded by a jungle the Lord showed him the vestiges of a large number of dhunis (fire places) and said : "Look! You will realize now that I have not made Myself visible to you so easily after all. You haven't done much for my sake, it is true, in this birth. But now look at these: they are the relics still visible of the dhunis you used to kindle fires for practicing austerities (tapasyā) in your previous births. They are vivid vestiges of your strenuous spiritual efforts in the past – in a series of incarnations. Nona's eyes were now opened; his momentary sense of elation was shattered.

Thus, you see now, while the priest could not receive divine grace even after worshipping Him for a long period, Nona got it suddenly. So, there is no hard and fast rule regarding Grace (kṛpā).

A listener – But as you said sir, Thakur showed him how he (Nona) had practiced tapasyā in his previous births.

Santadasji – Yes, that is true, indeed.

Q: Is it possible for a house-holder to attain God?

Santadasji – Why not? In our śāstras (scriptures) in many places the stage of the house-holder (gṛhastha) has been exalted over the three other stages of life (āśrama). God is not outside the world, unrelated to it. Knowing that this phenomenal world is His if one performs every work of this world in a spirit of service (to God) with humility – this indeed is to serve God who is present everywhere, in every creature. If this is not religion or spirituality, what else is it?
Serving all creatures as God – this is the dharma for all human beings, no matter what his caste is – Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya or Śūdra. It is the feeling that everyone, by performing his own assigned work should serve the world. The feeling of self-importance, that "I am something" eventually leads to spiritual downfall.

Between the sannyāsis who devotes himself to japa and dhyāna and the house-holder who, knowing that God is present in all beings devotes himself to the service of all – there is no difference. On the other hand, after performing karma for a long time one may gradually get detached from it; then one can give up karma and adopting sannyāsa devote oneself exclusively to japa and dhyāna. However, one may do that – practice japa and dhyāna without taking sannyāsa staying at home. "Man can attain spiritual perfection (siddhi) by worshipping Him by performing his own karma" says the Gītā (svakarmaṇā tamabhyarcya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ" ?

Q: If it is true that remaining in this world one attain bliss through devotion to God how is it that the sages of old have recommended the path of knowledge (jñānamārga) for ending all our sorrows and sufferings?

A: Yes, such a view too exists. For different nature and capacities there will be different prescriptions. There are indeed people who are deeply disturbed, so violently pestered and plagued by this world (saṃsāra) that they would try desperately to escape from it. If you tell them that this world is full of bliss, that it is possible to attain bliss even in this world (saṃsāra) by devoutly worshipping Him, how can you expect them to accept it? Such a view will be, for

them, incomprehensible. They won't relish such words. For them the right path is that which is prescribed by the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga systems (of philosophy). But there are people of a different kind who can endure even extreme sorrows and suffering of this life more easily than these people and experience ānanda (bliss) in the midst of this saṃsāra.

Q : How can a house-holder, living in saṃsāra have a vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa?

A: It doesn't matter whether one happens to be a house-holder (saṃsārin) or a sannyāsin who has renounced the world; what is needed for this vision (of the Divine) is an intense yearning. Unless this yearning is there, Kṛṣṇa-vision will not take place, no matter whether one is a saṃsārin or a sannyāsin. This yearning for the Divine is like the feeling of thirst; you are moving about, doing this or that – yet the longing for water is present all the time. When, to take another example, adolescence comes, it manifests itself naturally, in certain features – changes of the body and mind; similarly, when you attain the state of purity, your mind will not rest until it has the vision of God; it will not stray in any other direction. You won't be able to forget him even for a moment.

Q: How does this yearning come?

A: Contact with persons who have felt it and the company of good, spiritually elevating books. To live in the company of holy men, to imbibe the spiritual energy such a person constantly radiates, and reading everyday and at regular hours some good books. You will perceive its beneficial effects in a few days. One should do these things regularly, according to a fixed routine. If you can practice bhajana from the habit of reading good books everyday at regular hours and follow this routine strictly you will see result in a few days.

Q: If a person devotes himself to the service of all creatures believing the Divine is present everywhere without practicing japa and dhyāna, can he achieve spiritual progress?

A: Don't think that the way of service (sevā) is trivial, childhood affair. Of all sādhanas it is the easiest and the most certain. But even this (path of service) you will not be able to practice , let alone sādhanas of a high order (like bhajana).

I shall tell you the story – a true one of a man – Navin Munshi. He had a son. He served his son with a degree of devotion that surpassed even that – which one feels towards the Guru or the adored Deity (iṣṭa). How to give him the kind of food the boy will relish most, how to provide him with a seat that would give him the greatest comfort and a bed that would be most conducive to sound sleep – those were the thoughts that pre-occupied him throughout the days and he did all he could for the sake of his son.

He would prepare a bed of the best quality and lay him (his son) down on it. After the boy fell asleep, Navin Babu, to ascertain whether it was deep sleep would approach the bed on tip-toe gently and stretching and listen intently to the sound of breathing trying to find out whether it was like that is heard in deep sleep or that heard during light sleep. After sending the boy to school in an excellent carriage under a highly trusted escort, he would be anxiously waiting to learn news of the latter's safe arrival (at the school), or whether he arrived there (at the school) safely and spent the time in peace. He would keep gazing along the road till the boy returned from the school. He was mad about his son – in every matter relating to him.

When he was sixteen or seventeen, his son was struck by a fatal disease. He then devoted himself to nursing the boy with a tenderness and care that is beyond words. The disease showed no signs of abatement. Navin Babu saw it, but he was not upset. He did all he could in the way of nursing and medical treatment. He realized at last that there was no chance of his son's recovery – he must die. Then, one day he slowly approached the bed where his son was lying and bringing his face close to his son's, said gently, tenderly and with intense earnestness: "My son! You didn't, I hope, ever since you came to me, suffer at any time and on any account. Did you? " As if everything (in Navin Babu's life) depended on the reply to this. The boy burst

into tears, and weeping copiously, said "No father! I haven't suffered at all at your hands. I have only one desire : If I am to born again, I wish to be born as your son again." To his immense relief, the father now learnt that there had been no lapse in his service to his son. Soon after this the son died. The strange thing was that the father showed no signs of grief; he didn't even shed tears, as of everything was normal, as if nothing had happened.

This is how you should serve all; if you can do this you will achieve everything through it (service) alone. Whatever you do, you should do as His work, His service, His worship.

(One of the listeners): You said Sir that the sevā (service) is easy as a sādhana. But it seems now that it is not easy at all.

Santadasji: Do you want, my son, to attain mukti or mokṣa (liberation) without doing anything? That is not possible.

New Chapter

Q: Trust and faith in the Guru, whole-hearted devotion towards him – these, we have heard, are all important in sādhana. This being so, the Guru can surely strengthen the faith and devotion of the disciple by the display of his yogic and occult powers!

A: The notion that experience of yogic and occult powers increases one's faith and devotion towards the Guru is not correct. Lord Kṛṣṇa showed His Cosmic Form (viśvarūpa) to Duryodhana; but the latter put it down to just a magical feat, nothing more. Besides, He had slain Pūtanā and Kaṃsa when He was a mere boy; he also held the mount Govardhana in his boyhood. How much was the impact?

A Listener – Maharaj! He displayed supernatural powers from the very moment of His birth in jail.

Santadasji Maharaj: Yes; that's true. But then, how many, after witnessing these extraordinary displays of supernatural powers believed him as its divine Lord and looked upon Him as such?

These things are better ignored; for if one is preoccupied with these things (occult powers and son on) and mind gets involved inextricably. That is not the way to get faith and devotion (bhakti); it is these – faith and loving devotion – after all which are ultimately salutary and spiritually desirable.

Remember – witnessing displays of yogic powers seldom has the intended (or expected) effect; this is why spiritually exalted persons love to conceal all these (yogic) powers:

One day, a brother disciple of mine asked Guruji (Śrī Śrī Svami Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj) : "Baba! You possess such yogic powers! Why then do you live like an ordinary man? At this he (Guruji) replied : " My son! You are a child, you don't understand. I can show you any kind of power-display you would like to see. I can make you see or hear anything you want. One thing however you must know for certain: after that, you won't see this body of mine again." Baba (My son)! By satisfying one's curiosity regarding occult powers, one cannot attain spiritual progress. It is only by virtue of faith and devotion that man can and does advance in the realm of the spirit.

Q: Is it true that one can acquire supernatural powers through the practice of haṭha-yoga or other yogic methods like prāṇāyāma?

A: There are such a variety of yogic exercises or operations in haṭha-yoga like "neti", "dhauti" and so on. Haṭhayogis can, for instance, draw out the entrails from the abdomen and after washing them, put them back. They will swallow slowly a 20-metre long strip of cloth and then, slowly and carefully draw it out. It will be seen that the entire strip of cloth has been made

slippery by mucus. (It is strange – what a terrific amount of mucus there is in our bodies). By carrying out operations like these, they acquire considerable power. Haṭhayogic processes also demand a lot of time.

A devotee – Baba! Can one achieve spiritual progress through such practices?

Santadasji Maharaj: No; through the practice of these methods alone achievement of spiritual progress is not possible. But the powers that one acquires through the exercises can be conducive to spiritual advancement if they are not misused. Both body and mind are strengthened by such practices, and for sādhana, strength of mind and body is evidently needed. But to follow this path till the last stage involves an exceedingly long period of time; besides, there are many dangers along the road. The quantity of food one takes must be measured exactly, for instance; even slight fluctuations may cause serious trouble. If the strip of cloth, while being slowly drawn out from inside snaps, death will follow. Nevertheless, the powers one acquires through a correct performance of these operations are by no means deserving of contempt. It is certainly creditable for a person to refrain from using or abusing it; but for a person who possesses no power, to say that such powers are worthless – this is like the proverbial "grapes are sour".

That prāṇāyāma steadies the mind is quite true; but to continue to practice it till the very end is no matter of joke. Not only that; if anyone without brahmacarya (sexual continence; retention of sexual fluid) tries to practice prāṇāyāma and the higher yoga like meditation – too much and too long, he may develop phthisis. Practice of yogic exercises like prāṇāyāma is after all, not absolutely indispensable for the attainment of spiritual perfection (siddhi).

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Late afternoon, Svami Santadasji Maharaj is seated on his āsana. He looks as if one who has withdrawn himself in the unfathomable depths of the Self. One by one people are coming in. The room is silent; everybody is waiting intently for him to speak. At last he is emerging from his withdrawn state, and turning to one of his disciples, directs him to read the sacred text of Śrīmad

Bhagavadgītā. As the latter lays the book on the floor, Santadasji Maharaj objects to it, saying that it betrays lack of reverence. A wooden small table is brought, the disciple, the disciple now lays the sacred book on it and is about to start reading, when Maharajji stops and exclaims : "What's this? You should start reading after offering praṇāma (salutation) and paying due respect to it". Being ashamed, the disciple bowed with deep respect and started reading. The very first sentence says how the Blessed Lord (Śrī Bhagavān) was giving upadeśa (spiritual instruction) to Brahmā. He is interrupted by a young man among the audience. He said: "Brahmā is a power (śakti), the creative power of God. How can God speak to a power?" Replying to this question Santadasji Maharaj said as follows:

"What exactly do you understand by śakti? Tell me. As a matter of fact, everything that you see or hear around you is nothing but śakti – power or energy. Even you yourself, for instance, are a śakti. Every visible form is a śakti; it is only a form of śakti. You are a student of science; now tell me: what is a gramophone? The young man who had appeared in the B.Sc. Examination some time ago, said in reply: "The sound of a song heard in a gramophone emits vibrations; these sound vibrations are registered on the record (disc)."

Santadasji Maharaj: It isn't quite clear. Listen. Every sound (śabda) has a form (rūpa) - - - - -

The young man, interrupting, cut in: "How strangė! It is getting somewhat abstract – I am afraid!"

Santadasji Maharaj: No. On the contrary, it's evident truth. You find it hard to grasp because the medium here is air (which is invisible). All right; let us take the case of water. You have seen water waves, surely. Now, aren't these waves forms of water?

The young Man – Yes, Sir.

Santadasji Maharaj: In the same way waves are produced in air; and these waves have forms. These forms and qualities are different – it is these diverse forms that are held in

the records (discs); from these again the sounds are reproduced. Thus, every power, every sound has a form. Brahmā is a power, and yet he can assume a form. Do you understand?

A devotee – Is this why nāma-japa leads to visions of diverse forms (rūpa)?

Santadasji Maharaj: (with firmness) Yes. It is bound to happen. Every mantra has a corresponding form (of the Deity). If mantra-japa (repetition of sacred names) is regularly done, in due time one must have vision of the Divine forms.

Now, let me tell you one thing. Whatever is said in the śāstras (sacred texts) is true. If, after reading them with understanding and judgment you can follow their teachings, well and good; if you cannot do so, accept with respect as utterances of great sages and seers (ṛṣis) – you will certainly be spiritually benefited. Remember – the ṛṣis are infallible.

At this, some among the audience exclaimed: "Yes, yes. They are omniscient, they know the past, the present and the future as well (trikālajña)

Santadasji Maharaj: (Suddenly looking graver, and closing the eyes as if meditating for a little while) – No. It cannot be said that all of them were omniscient and trikālajña. What I meant to say is that they never said anything on mere guess, without sound knowledge and understanding based on realization. They may not have known about other things, but the matter on which they spoke, they knew thoroughly well. This is why their statements are authentic and infallible (āpta) and consequently worthy of respect.

Suppose, you have a number of flower plants in your house. You know them thoroughly well and so have no doubts regarding them; hence, in relation to them you are an authority (āpta). But you may not have the same knowledge about the flower plants in the house of others. The ṛṣis came to know the real nature of things through Samādhi; they did not rely on speculation or guess-work. It is better therefore to accept what they have said with folded hands and with bowed heads.

A bhakta (devotee) – Does that mean that we are to accept and follow everything that has been said in Śruti, Smṛti, Purāṇa and Itihāsa?

Santadasji Maharaj: If there is anything that is opposed to Śrutis (the Upaniṣads) I won't ask you to accept it. But my son! It is very hard to understand what is against the Śrutis and what is not. It is the revelations of the Śrutis that have been set forth in various ways in the Smṛtis and the Purāṇas (in which ancient traditions and legends are enshrined). In the Purāṇas those difficult and highly abstruse concepts have been explained and illustrated by means of innumerable narratives so that they can be easily understood by all. Besides, in the Smṛtis (texts composed by the ṛṣis) and the Purāṇas there are many "incentive" statements which are meant to attract and arouse interest in people's mind. It won't do to clash over these incentive or hortative statements.

Suppose, there is a statement in a Purāṇa to the effect that if a person does not brush his teeth early in the morning with the twig of a certain specific plant he will be guilty of cow slaughter. It is not that he will really be guilty of this grave offence. The fact is this: to brush one's teeth with the twig of a specific tree, early in the morning has a beneficial effect. This manner of speaking is adopted in order to make sure that this wholesome practice is not neglected by the people. Being guilty of the crime of cow-slaughter is not to be taken literally, it is true; nevertheless, the fact to which this hortative statement draws our notice is an important truth. Take, for instance, the famous vedic injunction: "mā divā svāpsīḥ" – you must not sleep during the day. This, no doubt is true. Now to bring home this truth and make it attractive, a number of stories have been told in the Purāṇas. These stories of course, are not to be taken as actual facts (But to say this to you is somewhat risky; indeed!) but this does not derogate from the truth of this śāstric injunction in the slightest degree; (the truth of this remains wholly unaffected by the fictitious character of the illustrative narrative). It is failure to judge these matters in this way that causes trouble and confusion; otherwise there is no problem at all.)

A woman disciple – Baba! We cannot understand much by studying books.

Santadasji Maharaj: This is precisely the reason why one should not read all sorts of books. Owing to the speed of the printing press, all books are within reach of all people, no

matter whether they are capable (or not) of understanding them. In former times teachers would prescribe different things for different persons. As a result the disciple would get what was best for them. Again, when a particular text was prescribed, the teacher sometimes would not permit the pupil to read the whole of it, but only the portions of it which the latter was competent to grasp.

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Q: What is prescribed or right work (vihita karma)?

A: For the celibate, the householder and the forest recluse (who belong to the corresponding three stages of life called brahmacarya, gārhasthya and vāṇaprastha), the duties (positive and negative) laid down in the śāstras constitute karma. If performed for the pleasure of God in a spirit of worship, all these karmas become a form of worship. At the last (fourth) stage of life the karmas are no longer obligatory; so they are abandoned. This is known as sannyāsa (the fourth stage).

Q: Does this mean that through the performance of the usual duties of a householder, like shopping etc., one can worship God?

A: Yes; if you can perform them in a spirit of worship.

Q: But then the Gītā says: "All actions are done wholly and only by Prakṛti through its guṇas (Nature) – "prakṛteḥ kṛyamāṇāni and guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ?

A: Yes. That too is true. But, in that case, if I abuse you, you shouldn't abuse me in return or fly into a rage. Whatever may happen, praise or blame whatever may come – you must know them to be nothing but a play of guṇas (cosmic qualities – sattva, rajas and tamas) and so view them as spectators, detached and unaffected – without protest.

A bhakta - In these days, such things are not possible in practice.

Santadąsji Mahraj: No. that's not true. Nothing is impossible. But for that spiritual effort (sādhana) is necessary. Besides, not everybody is meant for it.

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Q: God makes some people happy, some unhappy. Why this discrimination?

A: In this birth one gets (enjoys) the fruits in accordance with such actions (karma) done in previous births. Happiness and unhappiness, gain and loss – know all these to be the consequences of your actions done in previous births. By putting up a person as mere occasion – figurehead, so to speak, the Divine Providence brings to everyone happiness and misery, gain as well as loss and soon as a consequence of the karma done in his previous incarnations. Hence the person who is apparently responsible for your happiness or misery is really nothing. It is the fruits of your own karma that you are enjoying or suffering now and will continue to do so in future. By suffering, your present want and sorrow, the sins committed by you in your previous births will be washed away and thus you would be purified.

But the person through whom the Divine Dispenser causes another to suffer must suffer the consequences of his action in a subsequent incarnation. Hence, a wise man feels compassion towards the malefactor. For, he thinks: "through this person God is washing away my own sinful acts while he will have to suffer for his action in a future birth." The wise man therefore feels pity for him. The sweeper, for instance, cleanses the lavatory and thus keeps the house clean; but for this act he is degraded in society and segregated. It is like that. A conscientious person, regarding the sweeper as benefactor and his act as a great service feels kindness towards him. The same ought to be your attitude towards your seeming malefactor. In the case of a person who adopts such an attitude, the Divine Providence diminishes the amount of suffering and distress.

Q: Happiness and suffering in this birth are the effects of one's own acts (karma) done in previous incarnations. If this is so, it is sheer ignorance to hold God or any other person for what

we suffer. And for the good and bad karma done in the present birth we have to suffer and enjoy in births to come. Is there then no way out, no escape from this interminable cycle of karma?

A: The stored up karma which accumulated during previous incarnations is called saṃcita karma. The fruits of action which are about to be enjoyed and have formed the present body and has started operating is called prarabdha karma. From the stored up (saṃcita) karma some portion is set apart to form the body. The moment the amount of karma that gave rise to this body is used up or worked out – this body will fall off. And the karma – both good and bad that you have done in the present body which is called kriyamāṇa karma, will be stored up to be consumed in subsequent incarnations. Thus the interminable karma of every jīva keeps accumulating, and passing through the bodies of various species (non-human as well as human) those karmas work themselves out through bhoga; on the other hand, the fruits of karma goes on accumulating.

All kinds of bhoga are not possible in a particular body. The kind of karma-bhoga that is possible in a human body is not possible, say, in a canine body. Likewise, the kind of bhoga that is possible in a canine body is impossible in the body of an insect. The same is true of place, time and the nature of the individual. The period of time during which a karma will be worked out (gone through) that karma will await that precise point of time. From time immemorial the jīva passing through an infinite number of different bodies has been enjoying and suffering infinitely diverse kind of karma-bhoga.

You have received this body to enjoy or suffer the fruits of your (past) karmas. Without the grace of the Sadguru it is impossible to escape from this karma-bhoga and this endless transit from one body to another. Through the grace of the Sadguru the stored-up (saṃcita) karma is destroyed, but the course of the prārabdha karma (that has brought about the present incarnation) cannot be stopped. It is just like what happens when a train, traveling at high speed suddenly has its engine cut off; the train moves on for some distance from inertia and then later comes to a halt. Though through the grace of the Sadguru the course of karma is virtually stopped, the final cessation of saṃsāra (eternal transit) may be delayed for a maximum period

of three incarnations owing to the force of saṃskāras (impressions) accumulated for an endless period of time.

In the case of some persons karma is so strong that it cannot be avoided by any means. You see - twigs and logs (of wood) rapidly drifting along the current in a river are sometimes caught in a whirlpool; they cannot proceed further (until all on a sudden a stronger current comes and rushes them along) towards the destination. They keep whirling round and round for sometime; then comes a strong current which, as the bhoga ends, rushes them along again. In a like manner, some jīvas, while proceeding along the path of life are caught in the whirlpool of karma and then, after the period of bhoga is over, resume their journey along the right path and in due course reach their destinations. It is indeed supreme good fortune that, through the grace of the Guru, he is not left behind. If the soil is good, his transit is stopped forever in the very birth in which he received the grace of the Sadguru and gradually attains liberation. Otherwise, this – end of saṃsāra – rarely happens in less than three births. But the incarnations that take place after receiving the Sadguru's grace are not so painful. In these subsequent lives he finds himself born in bodies which are eminently fit for practice of spiritual exercises (bhajana) and owing to the presence of good habits and impressions (saṃskāras) inherited from previous birth (or births) becomes, from his childhood, naturally fond of bhajana for which he develops a natural aptitude.

Q: How to get happiness and peace?

A: Real peace can be attained only if one can give up all hopes of getting happiness from saṃsāra – from one's wife, children and other near relations, for instance and get rid of all desire for enjoyment from worldly objects. So long as one is attached to things of external world, to wealth and so on, attainment of peace is impossible.

There was a prostitute named Pingalā. She was waiting one day for her paramour till late in the night. She had kept the door open expecting him turn up at any moment. But when she found that the man, she was thus tensely expecting didn't come, she reflected like this: "the hope that he would come is after all what caused her this mental agony". She came to the conclusion that hope in some form or other is the root cause of all sorrow. Pondering the matter in this way, she

gave up hopes of all kinds. Having thus abandoned all hopes of finding happiness in external objects, her mind now turned to God with great devotion and earnestness and thus she at last attained peace.

If you expect all the people around you to be after your heart you are expecting something that will never happen. Your mind is very small, while this world is infinite and so is the number of jīvas. What each one of them needs as something that this small mind of yours can never conceive. The Divine Dispenser alone knows that and arranges everything for everybody according to his needs. Those who are here are compelled to conduct themselves as directed by Him. Knowing that nobody has an independent existence if you can cherish in your heart a feeling of love towards them, then and then only will you be able to attain real peace. True, sometimes your own wish is fulfilled by God, but the joy caused by this is not true peace. It is only he who, even when things happen against his own wish, can remain calm and undisturbed can attain imperturbable peace. The Blessed Lord says in the Bhagavadgītā : "The best of all yogins is he who is equal-minded towards the virtuous as well as the wicked" (sādhuṣvapi ca pāpeṣu samabuddhirviśiṣyate). You should always bear this great utterance in mind: No matter what sort of a person one happens to be you should try to be lovingly disposed towards him and treat him kindly.

Sustained happiness is nowhere to be found in this world (saṃsāra). The karma done in former incarnations is different for different persons. Those who have been brought together in this birth and related to one another as father, sons, husband, wife, friend and son on – all have behind them previous ante-natal karmas of different kinds; through Divine dispensation they have been united in the present birth. Some among them are separated from one another even in the present birth. Some others, however, remain united. At the time of death, everybody has to depart from this world alone, when all earthly relations become irrelevant. When the previous karmas of everyone is different, the experience of happiness and unhappiness also must be different.

Through suffering the sins of previous incarnations are washed away; therefore knowing this truth, if anyone belonging to one's family suffers distress, one should not be affected; knowing that this is the way of the world and should therefore calmly perform one's present duties;

otherwise, if one is distressed by it oneself, it does good to nobody and makes one remiss in the discharge of one's duties. You should bear this in mind and knowing that one enjoys or suffers according to one's karma if you can remain involved and detached you will attain real happiness, otherwise, you will suffer. You must try to develop the habit of thinking that you neither prosper nor suffer disaster. It is owing to your feeling that your wife, your sons and daughters are your own that you are all the time haunted by fear that some danger may befall them. It is due to your ignorance of the fact that God alone is your keeper and protector, and that you yourself are absolutely powerless to do anything that the faintest hint of any trouble involving them you feel as your own danger. Remember – you are only His servant, that your wife and children are His living forms, that in these forms He is only receiving a small service. According to the nature of service He likes to have from you He brings upon Himself various bodily conditions like disease and so on. In all these conditions you should serve them to the best of your capacity, exerting to the full the power He has given you and then remain at peace – free from all worries and anxieties; the rest will be done by Him – that is His affair, not yours. When this attitude of mind ripens you will attain non-attachment in this world (saṃsāra); you will then be able to perform all actions without craving for its fruits in a spirit of service to the Divine and finally attain peace.

Q: How can one achieve equal-mindedness towards happiness and distress?

A: Those who had done virtuous deeds in their previous incarnations attain purity of mind by working out their meritorious karma through enjoyment of happiness. Those who had done evil deeds in their previous births have their minds purified by working out their sins through their sufferings. In all conditions God is your greatest well-wisher. So, fixing your whole heart on Him accept whatever He ordains with bowed head.

Q: Is God making us do whatever good and bad deeds are done by us?

A: Yes, it is He who makes us do every act of ours. It is through His wish that everything happens, and all your actions, both good and bad, are designed particularly to benefit you. True. You cannot understand at this moment what purpose is being served by which karma; you will gradually come to understand what kind of good is done by a particular act. You must be

careful however; for you may do an evil deed according to your own wish on the pretext that it is all His will. Whenever the desire to perform an evil act arises in you must immediately try to suppress it. It is only those actions which take place in spite of your extreme reluctance to perform them that you may rightly attribute to God's. For all these acts you should not be seized with remorse. Nevertheless, you should be strongly determined and firmly on your guard so that such things are not done by you in future.

Q: Does the bhakta (devotee) too suffer the fruits of his actions?

A: Yes. Everybody has to suffer the fruits of his karma. It is true that the fruits of actions issue from the acts themselves. Bhakti, however, can never be the cause of suffering; on the contrary, it alleviates the amount of suffering resulting from karma alone in previous births.

What appears to us as a sorrowful state in other may, as a matter of fact, often turn out to be not in the least painful to the person concerned. It is customary, for instance, to regard a man without property or wealth as unhappy; yet, in many cases the poor are found to be happier at heart than the rich. Even physical illness, seemingly so distressing in the eyes of other people, does not feel to be so after all; moreover, the illness really results in his spiritual well-being. One may therefore be quite wrong in judging the state of happiness or misery of real bhaktas by observing them from outside.

Q: For house-holders it is not possible to occupy themselves all the time with worship or service to God; besides, there are all sorts of impediments. What will they do?

A: The saṃsāra (world) belongs to Him; whatever one does here is for Him alone. We are so many of us in the āśrama (hermitage) – some are engaged in worship and divine service, some in shopping and purchase, some others in some other job and so on. If everyone thinks "I am performing service to the Divine – he is doing real work. You ought to do your duties to all those who happen to be connected with you in saṃsāra as service to God. Then this world is changed. If one conducts one's life believing that the Divine is fully present in all beings this saṃsāra turns into His saṃsāra. Every creature comes from Him; even your own son didn't come to you at your own wish. He won't grow up according to your wish. You may wish him to

be good, but he may turn out to be bad; you may fear he will turn out to be bad and yet perhaps become good. You should think all the time that everything happens through His will.

You live, for instance, in a rented house. You don't feel it as your own; you can leave it whenever you like. You should feel the same way regarding this world.

There is separate Power called Satan. How He will get everything done is hard to grasp. He is the only controller of this Universe. Our way of sādhana (spiritual method) is to see the Divine everywhere, to convince oneself of the pervasive presence of Brahman; for there is no other being in the world.

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Q: Divine meditation (dhyāna) : I cannot concentrate my mind on any divine form (image). What shall I do?

A: Wherever you happen to feel the presence of the Divine – whether it is a point, or the void, or an image, it does not matter – you hold on to it during meditation, there is no compulsion here. There is only one condition: you must have full faith in the divinity of the object on which you fix your mind; then and only then, will you get the result. Every object, visible form is He Himself; Void (ākāśa), a single point in space or a divine image.

There is one thing you should constantly bear in mind in this connection: Don't harbour ill-will against anybody. All is His play (līlā). The less you harbour malice towards anybody, the more you will be able to fix your mind in meditation – or else, it (feeling of ill-will) – will not allow your mind to concentrate. If there is no perception of the presence of God in others, all your efforts are in vain. Worship and adore whichever divine form you love but don't cherish any hostile feeling towards those who worship a different form of the Deity.

The ceremony of instilling life (prāṇa) in an image of the Deity means believing firmly in the divinity of the idol. You must believe that you are thus invoking the One who is all-pervading. As

a result of sustained and devout meditation on a stone image, power is manifested in it, just as milk is manifested (that flows out) to the calf when it approaches its mother. Attracted by this manifestation of power people start visiting it. The power which thus dwells in an object becomes manifested at times, and dormant at other times. You, for instance, possess power, but when you are asleep, so is your power; when you wake up, your power too does so (reappears).

Whatever exists in this world is a form of the Divine. He is fully present in every creature; this is the essential truth. But this conviction does not come to one easily. This is the reason why one should devoutly look upon one's Guru as well as the divine image as full Brahma. As a result of sustained practice in this direction the Divine gradually reveals Himself everywhere. Reposing full faith in the Guru as the Divine Himself, as Brahman, one should make a total self-surrender to him. He who can do this soon gets a direct vision of God.

Q: What exactly in this vision of God like?

A: He Appears in the form on which one constantly meditates. You and I for instance, are talking to each other; he will be seen by you like that – as closely and as vividly. I have told you (disciples) to meditate on Him as the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha (the divine abode of Viṣṇu). He will appear to you exactly in that form and talk to you.

In whatever form God appear before the sādhaka, He gradually lets him (the sādhaka) have the inward connection that is His form. The divine Form which He assumes specifically for the ultimate spiritual well-being of the World is that of Lord Viṣṇu. Appearing in this divine Form of Viṣṇu, He sometimes reveals himself graciously to sādhakas. This is the consummation of physical vision.

The other kind of vision is the same as union with the Divine. Then the distinction between the meditator and the object of meditation is totally obliterated. This state has been described clearly in the eleventh book (skandha) of Śrīmadbhāgavata. This is the state which has been hinted at by the Bhagavadgītā (VI-25) in the words : "na kiṃcidapi cintayet" (you should think of

nothing). When the mind thus reaches this state of total void, when, that is to say, there is no object of thought, the Self (Ātman) reveals Himself.

Q: When all forms are His, what is the point in saying that it is His divine forms as Śrī Kṛṣṇa that is immensely conducive to supreme well-being and hence is the special object of worship in our sampradāya (Vaiṣṇava Order) ?

A: All manifested forms in this universe are doubtless His forms and keeping this constantly in mind you should deal with everybody in a spirit of service to the Divine. Nevertheless, though all these forms are essentially divine, there are an infinite degree of intrinsic differences among them. Keeping in mind these intrinsic differences of Power, a particular divine Form is chosen by the sādhaka as the object of special devotion and meditation. For bringing about the general well-being of mankind the Divine Himself descended in this world in the blessed form of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This blessed form of His (as Lord Kṛṣṇa) is salutary of all creatures in this world. You should regard the Guru's external form as the divine image; but for us, the divine Form of Lord Kṛṣṇa is to be generally recommended for constant worship.

Q: Isn't image worship a form of idolatry?

A: He is present everywhere, the image is not outside Him. For the spiritual well-being of one who sincerely desires to worship Him, yet is unable to conceive Him as omnipresent. He manifests His Power through that limited image. What is wrong there if a person who is unable to conceive the entire universe as Brahman is able nevertheless to accept even one particular object as Brahman? After all, that person has learnt to conceive at least one object as Brahman – namely, the divine image. Then, with the gradual increase in his conceptual power, his mind automatically expanses and thus finally becomes capable of conceiving the entire universe as Brahman. At last, the wise and discerning sādhaka is able to achieve the final Realization – Brahman-knowledge. Hence, by the worship of an idol as Brahman, it is Brahman-nature of the idol that is revealed to the sādhaka and not the other way round. Brahman, in other words, does not become an idol or image.

There is a śloka in Śrīmadbhāgavata where Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava:

arcādāvarcayettāvadīśvaraṃ māṃ svakarmakṛt

yāvanna veda svahṛdi sarvabhūteṣvavasthitam. (3.29.20)

Until Man experiences in his own heart, God who is present in every object (and, every creature) he should worship Me in a divine image – performing all the duties prescribed by his station in life as enjoined by the śāstras.

The ancient seers (ṛṣis) who taught Brahmavidyā were not therefore plunged in separation; they were never suggested that the worship of this or that particular deity is the highest religion. To each person they had prescribed that form of worship which is best suited to his temperament and capacity. There is a fundamental difference here between Hinduism and other religions; in other religions there is the same prescription for everybody; it is not so in Hinduism; the teachers of the Hindu religion have recommended the practice of that particular form of worship (or other spiritual processes) for which a person is fitted and in order to promote respect and adherence to it, declared that it is the best form of worship and urged to keep it intact. This is not a case of deliberate deception on the part of the teachers; as a matter of fact, the kind of religious practice for which one is best fitted is the best of all for him; for him, no other prescribed form of worship is quite as good.

By devout and whole-hearted worship of God in one of His incarnate forms (avatāra), by the remembrance of His sacred name, by meditating on Him, and reflection on His various qualities and exploits, the jīva becomes totally engrossed in Him; hence, from this state of self absorption in the Divine His all-pervasiveness becomes naturally perceptible by the sādhaka, and thus, gradually they become fit to be reckoned among spiritual aspirants of the highest order. This is what is known as worship of God with a form (sākāra); it is really the worship of the Divine in the full sense of the term. This is not idolatry; it is, on the contrary, an extremely easy and excellent spiritual process characteristic of the path of love and devotion for the Divine (bhakti-mārga).

The divine images of God in the incarnate forms (avatāra) are the objects of worship among people in general. For those who are unable fully to take to the vedantic path, whose minds are

incapable of conceiving the Supreme Brahman as both immanent in the universe and all-transcendent, who are unable to view all things with an equal mind owing to a sense of dualism (the great majority of human beings are in this condition) the worship of divine images is an excellent spiritual means of bhakti-mārga.

You won't get much spiritual benefit if you only worship the external stone-image; if you have firm faith in the full divinity of the adored idol, if you are firmly convinced that He is endowed with all the divine attributes which are mentioned in the śāstras – if you can conceive Him as such and thus meditate on Him your heart will be instantly filled with deep emotion and you will feel His grace. If you set up, as prescribed by the śāstras, a stone image of the Deity as avatāra, God Himself, fully endowed with all His divine attributes, will appear in it. If you can meditate thus, the truth of this can be felt.

Q: Baba! Does this stone idol actually become Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Rādhā, endowed with all divine attributes like omnipotence?

A: Yes, this image has actually become His very Divine Self.

One day, before I became mahanta, a certain Vrajvasi (an inhabitant of Vrindavan) Kheyali Ram Panda came in order to cook the food for the Thakur. While cooking the bhoga he also prepared two tekkaḍs (a kind of sweet bread – a favourite item of food in those areas) specially for the Thakur. Pandaji took all the bhoga himself and offered it to Thakurji. Śrī Śrī Thakurji took one tekkaḍ from the offered bhoga. It so happened that after the bhoga offering (which is done secretly, away from public eye) one tekkaḍ was found missing. The natural conviction of all Vrajvasis is that Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Rādhā are themselves are actually present (in Vrajbhumi); the very notion that they are only stone images is alien to them. So evident is this habitual belief of theirs that He could no longer conceal His identity to them; so much so indeed, that He chose to take one tekkaḍ in order to strengthen their belief.

Q: Is the disciple of a Sadguru never laid astray?

A: In the view of the ordinary people, it is impossible to understand how and in what ways the Sadguru leads his disciple. It is only those whose third eye has been opened can really

understand that what appears as (moral and spiritual) degradation to the common eye turns out to be precisely that which advances the sādhaka towards his desired goal. Concerning this there is a story. It runs as follows.

Once, cholera broke out in a Brahmin family in Dhaka. All died in the family except a boy. The house-holder who lived in an adjacent house gave shelter to the helpless boy and engaged him in various household jobs. Whenever the boy was found guilty of any lapse in his duties he was sternly rebuked and severely beaten by his master. Deeply hurt by the humiliation he had to suffer for his food and shelter the boy began to reflect: What shall I do now? Where shall I go? It so happened that at that time a sādhu came to the village and set up his āsana under a tree. The villagers came to him in large numbers and offered him rice, dal, vegetables, milk, fruits and sweets which soon formed into a large heap. The boy was then twelve or thirteen. Seeing all this the boy thought: here's an excellent means of escape and deliverance! I shall turn a sādhu. From now on I shall be free. The boy slipped out of the house in search of a sādhu. Wandering from place to place he at last came to the Santhal Parganas. There, he came across a sādhu, with a radiant look seated under a tree. The boy approached him an humbly intimated to him his earnest desire to become a sādhu. The mahatma graciously gave him dīkṣā (initiation). But this didn't fill the heart of the boy. He said "You did really turn me into a sādhu, did you? But I came here to become a sādhu." The sādhu told him, "My son! You go back and pursue your studies; when the time comes I shall myself call you and turn you into a sādhu. That time has not yet come". At this the boy burst into tears, and said, "Baba! If I had a place to live in and adequate means to pursue my studies I wouldn't have come here to become a sādhu. Why should I?". The mahatma replied, "Don't be worried; what the guru says should be obeyed. As for your accommodation facilities for studies – they will be arranged. When the time comes, you will certainly become a sādhu; for the present you practice japa (of the mantra I gave you) regularly and devotedly and pursue your studies." Saying this he directed one of his disciples to get a ticket for Howrah station and secure him a seat in the train compartment. The boy prostrated himself before the guru and left him most reluctantly, walking along weeping all the time.

Alighting at the Howrah station the boy was loitering here and there amidst a sea of humanity. A certain gentleman asked him, "Where will you go?" The boy replied, "There is no place for me to

go to." Taking the boy with him he went home and made all arrangements for his board and lodging and his studies as well. He gratefully remembered the greatness of his guru and his tender grace. Filled with an overwhelming feeling of bhakti he practiced his japa and his academic lessons regularly and whole-heartedly. Gradually he came to pass his M.A. and B.L. examinations and joined the Bar at the court of law. Within a short while he started earning a lot of money; he then married and became a house-holder. Along with this undreamt of affluence came evil company. After sometime the mantra he received from his guru as well as his guru himself were lost in oblivion. Gradually he became addicted to drink and women, started bullying people and finally turned into a dissolute fellow, a downright blackguard.

He became a complete debauch; thus one day followed another – in unmitigated profligacy. One day as he was about to get into his carriage bound for the Court, a sādhu appeared before him and said, humbly, "Babu! Give me a paisa." The babu flew into a rage and rudely ordered him to clear out. In spite of this the sādhu persisted in plaintively asking for a paisa. The babu, seeing that the sādhu didn't leave even after being harshly abused, got him forcibly removed by his servant, who violently pushed him aside and then got into his carriage. The sādhu, however forced his way in front of the carriage, repeating, "babu! Please give me a paisa." Flaring up, the babu kicked him. Severely hurt by the shoe the sādhu's forehead began to bleed profusely; pressing his forehead with his left hand and extending his right the sādhu said,"babu! Please give me a paisa." Extremely amazed, the babu then got down from his carriage and said, "look, you fellow! I have seen many wicked people, but never, as far as I remember seen, one like you. What would you do with only one paisa?

The sādhu replied: "I don't need money." The babu reorted: "Indeed! Then why this brazen impudence?" The sādhu replied: "My guru has ordered me to take only one paisa from you. I pestered you repeatedly because I wanted to carry out my guru's command." Utterly surprised the babu muttered: "You say your guru wanted you to take one paisa from me.....but – what for?" The sādhu said: "I have no business to know the reason; all that I need to do is to carry out his orders." Hearing this the babu was suddenly changed. Hearing the word guru repeated so many times suddenly the memory of his guru arose in his mind. Instantly, his boyhood days of persecution and humiliation, leaving his home, the attainment of the guru, his education and his

present way of life – all these came rushing to into his memory and he felt deeply disturbed. He asked – "Who is your guru? Where does he live?" The sādhu disclosed his identity and said that his guru was then staying in Santhal Parganas. The babu said, "He is also my guru. I received initiation from him when I was a boy. All my present affluence is due entirely to his grace. As soon as he recalled his guru his heart was filled with self-reproach. He thought "Even after having received the spiritual bounty of a great soul and his unbounded grace how could I have turned into such a inhuman being, such a detestable brute". This thought deeply disturbed him. Then, turning to the sādhu he said, "Come, let us go together to the guru. I shall myself offer him the paisa." Immediately, getting out of his official robe as a legal practitioner, he clad himself in a simple cloth and taking just one paisa with him proceeded towards the place of his guru, accompanied by the sādhu. As he went along he recalled all the phases of his own life – and his heart was filled with deep shame and bitter self-reproach. Recounting to his brother disciple his entire past life in detail he began to weep. Arriving in Santhal Parganas he set down, saying - "An unredeemable sinner as I am, I cannot bring myself to approach the holy, God-like man. Take this paisa with you, I won't go away any further. There is hardly a sin of which I have not been guilty; I shall give up this sinful life – I can't endure it. But the sādhu wouldn't leave him. He forcibly made him proceed along the path, confronting him with sweet words all the way. The nearer he was getting to his guru his mental anguish at his own worthlessness became more and more intense – dragging him along, the sādhu at last reached the hermitage of his guru. At this moment he blurted out: "Enough. I cannot bring myself to show my sinful face to my guru. He is holiness incarnate; please leave me alone.

Seeing the compassionate Gurudeva advancing towards him he burst into tear and shouted: "I am a great sinner! Don't touch me." The guru embraced him tenderly, blessed him and said: "I shall make you a sādhu! Shave your head, take a dip in the Ganga and come back to me." He almost cried out: "Baba! I am no longer fit to become a sādhu. My body and soul have been grievously polluted by committing sins. When I came to you to become as undefiled as a flower, you didn't accept me. What shall I do now with this utterly depraved life of mine! Now death is the only thing I long for."

The Mahatma said: "Now is the time for you to become a sādhu. You see how I brought you here at the right time. You say you are unfit to become a sādhu. True your mind has been defiled through sinful conduct. But my son, you had need to go through these sufferings and disasters. They have worked themselves out through bhoga. So it is really now that you have become a sādhu. Now, concentrate your mind and practice intense tapasyā whole-heartedly. All these stains will be washed out through the grace of God. You should henceforward be on your guard so that your mind does not tend towards sense-enjoyments (bhoga) and sinful acts. Your life will be blessed. Had you become a sādhu then you wouldn't have been able to concentrate your mind. Those evil desires and tendencies would have all the time tempted you; your sādhana (would have been led astray) would not have proceeded along the right path. This present life would have passed in the same manner – unchanged."

Therefore you should make it a point not to judge or adversely criticize others. Be on your guard constantly and remaining so devote yourselves to the service of others and the chanting of His name. How and in what ways the Sadguru will lead the disciple and make him work out his bhoga is beyond the judgment of ordinary mind. There certainly exists a radical difference between the ordinary man and the disciple of a Mahatma – a great Guru.; the latter perceives his own defects more readily than does the former. The disciple of a Sadguru, in consequence of being conscious of his own fault, becomes free from them and thus gets himself rectified. Guru-śakti and the grace of the ṛṣis of old will come to his spiritual assistance.

Q: Does the Guru become displeased with us when we fail to follow his instructions?

A: The Guru does not take offence if the disciple fails to abide by his directions or follow his teachings. But remember my son, if the disciple shows contempt (towards the Guru or slights him in any manner, then, even if the Guru does not take offence, the disciple is doomed. God never tolerates any expression of contempt on the part of the disciple towards the Guru. The following story has been related in the śāstras – there was once a devotee of Lord Śaṃkara (Shiva) who used to worship him. One day, as he has just had a vision of Lord Śaṃkara when his Guru appeared. Even though he perceived that the Guru was standing there the disciple didn't get up to accept his Master. He was then absorbed in the vision of Lord Shiva. The Guru, even after knowing this was not angry. But Lord Śaṃkara became angry for his negligence and

cursed him thus: "For treating your Guru with contempt you will have to incarnate as a snake a hundred times over." Dismayed, the Guru, approaching Lord Śaṃkara, prayed to him "He (disciple) is a mere child, so doesn't understand. Why did you inflict on him such a terrible curse! Please be gracious to him." Meanwhile the disciple fell at the feet of the Guru. Pleased at the earnest prayers of the Guru Lord Śaṃkara said: "Look! What I have said cannot be otherwise. He will have to take birth as a snake for a hundred incarnations. However, when you haven't resented his lapse and are so kind to him, he will not have to suffer for long. He will be born and will die in quick succession, so that he will go through the hundred births in the form of a snake in a comparatively short period of time, and in every birth he will be a jātismara (one who remembers one's previous births).

Q: How is it that even one who has taken refuge in a Sadguru commits grave sins? Why doesn't the Sadguru restrain him from (indulging in) evil propensities? If, even after resorting to a Sadguru one's mind is not purified and one's evil tendencies do stop then what is the difference between such a person and ordinary people.

A: Many people got into the habit of drinking tea, for instance; after continuing this habit only for a few days they are unable to give it up. When on the occasion of performing a religious rite like observing a fast one has to go through without tea during the day one suffers a headache or becomes indisposed. All the time his mind is occupied by the thought of tea, eagerly waiting for the time when he will be able to take tea! When this habit of drinking tea lasting only for a few years can so dominate and attract the mind to such an extent that without it one becomes ill, so that one finds it difficult to give it up. How can one expect then that all the evil habits and tendencies persisting through an infinitely long period of time will disappear the moment one takes refuge in a Sadguru? What really happens is that the saṃskāras that accumulated through innumerable incarnations are cleansed and purified, and the road to freedom is opened up. The Sadguru has instilled his śakti (power) within you; now strive constantly to cleanse your mind of impurities, that is, rid yourself of all evil impressions (kusaṃskāras). Keep repeating mentally the mantra incessantly – while working, moving about, sitting or lying, in all conditions. Gradually your mind will get purified; at the same time, by the sprinkling of water of good thoughts the impurities of your mind will be washed out – your mind

will become purified. You won't do anything and yet will keep saying – "what has the Sadguru done for me, I wonder! He has given you power; apply it; otherwise, how could you experience the fruits? If you only hold rasogollas (juicy sweets), how can you feel the taste of them? If you only keep the medicines at home, will you be cured of your disease? If you only purchase tickets and then sit at home, will you ever reach Vrindavan? Some people, after practicing sādhana for a few days think – "I have done a great deal, and yet nothing has happened. So all has gone in vain; there is nothing in it (sādhana)." Fools as they are, they don't consider, don't understand how the stain due to the evil deeds done through endless incarnations have accumulated in the mind like stone. Is it possible that these will be wiped out in two or three years? If deep seated saṃskāras of endless births disappear in two or three incarnations – that would be great good fortune, boundless grace of the Sadguru! This is utterly impossible without the grace of the Sadguru. In comparison with endless it is like a drop of water compared to the ocean. It is true, nevertheless, that this can be achieved not only in two or three incarnations or years; it can be achieved even in two or three days if one can practice nāma (repeating the holy name mentally) with utmost earnestness.

Can you invoke him with all your heart? Do you know what invocation means? It means surrendering oneself to God. The real meaning of every mantra is surrendering oneself to Him – to offer oneself as an oblation to God; and to oneself as an oblation means to become one with Him. Whatever is dropped into the sacrificial fire as an offering is totally absorbed by it (fire). Is there any stain in fire? Fire is, in its very nature, pure radiance. All stain is burnt out when it comes in contact with fire. God is free from all flaws. How can any defilement, any evil saṃskāra exist in Him. It follows that anyone who surrenders himself totally to Him, as an oblation in the sacrificial fire, becomes at that very moment directly linked with him; how can any evil saṃskāra exist in his mind? The very moment he has totally offered himself at the feet of the guru or God (Remember – the Guru and God are one), has surrendered himself totally, he has become liberated. But where is that renunciation, that act of surrender? You will always carefully hold on to yourself and then exclaim: "Where is the sign of any tangible benefit?" Know it for certain truth that when a Sadguru has graciously taken hold of anyone, he (the Sadguru) never deserts him; you must have seen people catching fish in a river or a pond with a fishing hook – haven't you? The fishing hook pierces the very heart of the fish; it is very difficult to

disentangle it. There are some fish which, when struck by the hook, make a great stir and commotion in a desperate effort to free themselv1es. The angler knows that when the hook has struck the fish, however much it may agitate to free itself, it can't escape. Where will it go? After all there is no question of its getting away. So, to see the fun, he, instead of hauling the fish on the bank, he releases the thread to make the fish play about. The fish, in order to escape moves about as swiftly as it can but far from freeing itself from the fishing hook, as a result of straining at the thread the hook plunges deeper and deeper into its breast; consequently it suffers more and more pain. At last, when it gets exhausted and inert, the hook, that is to say, makes it its own. Similarly the Sadguru knows he has caught hold of the of the disciple, so there is no question of letting it go; besides, there is no way out, no other place to go to.

However, even after getting a Sadguru, those who are absorbed in the world, whose minds tend outwards (to the objects o enjoyment) and refuse to turn to the Guru, who, in other words, are disinclined to follow the words of the Guru – to such persons, the Guru, realizing their condition allows to move about following their own propensities as the angler does to the hooked fish. At the same time he arranges things for him in such a way that he (the disciple) gets opportunities to fulfill his desires. When the errant disciple, in the course of his enjoyment of illicit objects of desire becomes utterly exhausted, satiated, the disciple, through Grace of the Sadguru turns towards Him. But then, the defilement of the soul caused by these illicit enjoyments will have to be removed; and this must be brought about by the cleansing process; and this latter process inevitably entails suffering. When one is pierced by a thorn, it has to be removed by another (thorn). It is the business of the Sadguru to cleanse the heart of the disciple. Suffering is the consequence of sinful acts; this is why one should always be careful. As soon as evil desires arise in the heart one must try one's utmost to dispel them; otherwise suffering is inevitable. The best way to rid of these evil desires, to purify oneself is to repeat mentally names of the Divine – to practice japa; to make repeated attempts to spend one's time in thinking good thoughts and living in a holy manner, to pray earnestly to God, to live in accordance with the instructions of the Guru.

Note on the other hand that it is only when the fish becomes inert through exhaustion that the angler hauls it up. Similarly, when the disciple, after taking refuge in the Sadguru rids himself of

all sorts of I-ness and egoism and constantly offers himself up to the Sadguru the latter immediately makes him his own (assimilates him). For such a disciple, where is the bondage? Where the suffering? Even when he is in the world he enjoys perpetual bliss; no suffering, no trouble of this world can touch or disturb him.

Q: The fish that is pierced by the hook becomes inert, more dead than alive; but by resorting to a Sadguru the disciple becomes not impotent but powerful. How to explain this?

A: Don't you know that a metaphor is never wholly appropriate, comparable to the original object in every way? It is certainly true that the Guru forthwith assimilates one who rids himself of all self-ness and egoism and wholly surrenders himself at the feet of the Guru. It is the ego which makes a man intoxicated and thoroughly mundane (absorbed in the objects of this world); it is the self-sense that comes in the way of one's becoming a humble servant. The term "Viṣṇu" means "all-pervading". Lord Viṣṇu is omnipresent, being in the self of All. All names and forms are His – He Himself. It is the worshipper of this all-pervading divine Lord Viṣṇu who is Vaiṣṇava. The real Vaiṣṇava is therefore, the servant of Viṣṇu who is All. The servant is never arrogant or proud. So long as there is self-sense (ahaṃkāra) there cannot be true vaiṣṇavism.

Q: What is it that comes in the way of self-surrender?

A: It is tamoguṇa in particular, also, rajoguṇa. It is identification of the Self with the body that constitutes the main impediment. At bottom, it is the self-sense (ahaṃkāra). If I have a desire for an object my mind rushes towards it. If there is a desire I want to fulfill it. If, on the contrary, I offer myself, I have nothing to ask for. If you (God) offer food to me I eat, if you don't, I don't. It is like a used leaf-plate left over eating that is blown about by the wind. Make him famous – even that doesn't affect him in the least. I want this, I want that, if this attitude remains, there is no self-surrender.

Do you know the song?

You are mine; I am bound to you by your glory,

I am not in the least dejected where others are rude to me.

If you plunge me in the deep, I shall remain there,

If you are in bliss I can endure anything;

If you love me, I can burn in the fire.

When self-surrender takes place even desire for mokṣa disappears. It is you who have preserved me, for there is none else to do so, if I oppose this I deny you, violate against you. There is always an internal connection. If the son falls in a distant land, the heart of the mother sometimes responds to it. If such a relation subsists between mother and son, how much deeper must it be between the Guru and the disciple! Indeed, the relation between the Guru and the śiṣya is not a physical one; it is the spiritual connection between self and self. Self-surrender is no easy matter; he who surrenders himself is instantly liberated (from bondage). The moment he surrenders himself, he ceases to be a separate entity, he belongs entirely to his Master.

Q: If surrender takes place can it be perceived from outside? Is complete self-surrender possible to anybody other than God Himself?

A: To whomsoever you may offer your salutation, He (God) is the ultimate recipient. It has been said in the śāstras: the salutation to all the deities ultimately reaches Lord Viṣṇu. While prostrating oneself to the image of Lord Viṣṇu it is proper to keep Him to the left. On the other hand, it should be the reverse while doing so to His divine Consort. While prostrating oneself to the Guru, however, the rule is to keep him in front. You judge others by externals; you don't have the eye to see how much purity of heart a person has attained. Consequently, you judge right and wrong, good and bad by observing the outward conduct – which is not just. The person whom you contemptuously regard as drunkard or a moral debauch – even such a person may actually be spiritually on a higher level. It is very difficult my dear, to assess a man properly. The person for instance, who is regularly performing japa may go to hell.

A woman I know often intently gazes at me during ārati. People are apt to suppose that she is full of devotion to her Guru! Instead of watching the ārati of Thakurji she all the time keeps looking at me. I didn't like at all; it even annoyed me. At last I sent for her and rebuked her same: "don't do this anymore". Judging her conduct from outside she appears to be innocent;

but seeing through her mind I had to reproach her. The truth is that it is not possible to assess the person by his external behaviour. If one feels really drawn to God it becomes visible (manifested) immediately. If one feels love at heart one may indeed gaze at the Guru like that woman, for instance; but you ought not to suppose that looking intently at the Guru like that signifies real love within. A man judges others by out ward behaviour; not so God Who judges a person from what he is really at heart.

Once upon a time there was a prostitute in the Deccan who felt an intense desire to offer a gold necklace to the divine idol. The guardian priests of the temple stubbornly refused to accept the necklace offered by the fallen woman. Then one of them received a command from the Deity in a dream one night that the offered necklace must be accepted. Though the guardian-priests to decide to accept the necklace they refused to permit her come and garland the Deity herself. She would not only be allowed to enter the temple, she would not even be allowed to stand in the Natmandir (a kind of spacious ante-chamber in front of the inner temple). It was then that the divine Lord admonished the same priest in a dream that the prostitute must be allowed to garland Him herself.

Thus, obtaining permission when the prostitute (courtesan) arrived at the temple with the necklace she suddenly perceived that the menstrual period has started. Struck dead with shame she hurriedly handed the necklace to the priest and was about to leave the temple precincts. At that very moment the divine idol bent forward from His pedestal (podium) and took the necklace from her hand.

It is very difficult therefore to judge a person from outside and to recognize a true sādhu. It may so happen that a person is shedding a flood of tears and yet empty within.

Q: Does it mean that virtue or sin has no consequences?

A: Why not? The consequence of sin is suffering while that of virtue is happiness. Sin or virtue ceases to have any effect only when one is convinced that a certain act, performed either by oneself or by another is really something that God Himself made one or the other person to do, that it is He, in other words, who is the real agent of all actions. In such a case, one's heart

is naturally filled with peace. If the self-sense is totally obliterated there is neither sin nor merit. As the Bhagavadgītā says: "He who is free from the sense of "I am the doer", whose mind remains totally detached – even if he slays all these people really kills none and is therefore not bound (by his action)."

Q: From the worldly point of view, is this attitude good?

A: This attitude is possible only when the mind attains a considerable degree of purity. Is there any other way of attaining peace, my son? In the degree in which a man realizes that he is not the real agent of his actions his self-sense will diminish. If you know that all actions are being done by one Master, how can your self-sense exist? In proportion as you feel that God is the one Supreme Controller of the universe, the mind will become serene and the sense of the egoism (aham-buddhi) will diminish.

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NEW CHAPTER

Q: Contamination through sight and touch – are all these true?

A: Defilement through sight and touch really exists. You may not realize them but that does not mean that they don't exist. There are people who, if they happen to look at this tree (pointing to a tree standing in front of him), its leaves will wither up; it may even die.

Q: (A scholar disciple) Yes; I have heard about a certain technique called ban mara bidya (a tantrik process).

A: I am not speaking about any such technique my son. I am speaking about defilement through sight. It is not that he will intentionally harm the tree by applying some (tantrik) method; his very sight is like that. It may very well be that he had no desire to cause any mischief to the tree; but such is the evil influence of his look that the tree will be hurt). Similarly, there is

contamination through touch. This is present in all; in some, more, in others, less. Your mind may be defiled through the sight or touch of others – know it for certain truth. One should therefore try to protect oneself from contamination through sight or touch of others. There is no question here of harbouring malice towards others.

Q: But isn't it a fact that through the observance of rules and restrictions an attitude of hatred becomes inevitable?

A: That is not the fault of rules and restrictions my son! If it results in hatred it is due to one's own fault (of nature). Observance of the rules and regulations prescribed by the sages and seers of old always leads to one's well-being, never its opposite. This system of sitting in separate rows during meals for instance, is something that has certainly not been introduced for the first time now. Before this, great men, spiritually exalted souls have observed all these rules. Who are you, who am I to abolish or break them.

(When, at this point, the disciple was about to argue the matter, Swami Santadasji Maharaj suddenly folded his palms and said with profound reverence) – Look, my son! Those who laid down these rules understood more than you or I do. Accept what they said in all humility with bowed head – you will be (spiritually) benefited. If you can accept them after carefully examining them with proper understanding, there cannot be anything better. However, if you can't do that, at least accept their words as those uttered by ṛṣis and enlightened persons. But if you believe that you have understood better than they did, then do as you please.

(As he said this suddenly the disciple stopped arguing and said humbly : "I don't understand anything; I shall do whatever you tell me." Pleased now, he said in reply) Yes – that, at any rate, I understand. (Then he said with great tenderness) You were saying a moment ago that many lapses and drawbacks occur while trying to observe these rules and regulations. Even if they occur, their prescriptions should be followed, my son. Whatever rules of conduct are prescribed for one should be followed. No action can be completely free from defects. Hence, one' rules of conduct "should not be abandoned", as the Gītā says, "even if they are imperfect (or defective) – sadoṣamapi na tyajet. For, all actions are stained with flaws as fire is by smoke – "sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmeṇāgnirivāvṛtāḥ"; again, one's own natural code of conduct even if it is marred

by flaws, is preferable to, that of another, even if well-performed – "śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt". Have you understood?

Disciple : Yes Sir!

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Santadasji Maharaj: No object sits still; it radiates energy. If I approach you I shall imbibe something of your energy (śakti) and instill something of my own. This transmission of energy occurs mostly through touch. If you happen to have an elevated nature, then if you touch me, your good propensities will pass into me. If a wicked person touches the feet of a saint he will receive the good qualities of the saint while the evil propensities of the wicked will enter the soul of the latter.

Q: If this is so it is not proper to touch the feet of everybody – isn't it?

A: Don't touch the feet of everybody. You should touch the feet, take the dust of the feet only of those whom you regard as worthy of reverence, not of others'. Nevertheless, you can offer your praṇāma (salutation) to everyone as one with God; but even so you should not take the dust of his feet or touch them.

Q: The mind is sometimes exalted by sattva-guṇa; at other times it is defiled by all sorts of undesirable and harmful tendencies like sensual desires, anger, avarice, malice and pride even when one is constantly watchful. Sometimes the mind is cheerful sometimes filled with deep despair, when it seems that all efforts are futile. If the mind suffers such a hopeless condition, how is it possible to achieve spiritual progress? How is it that I am assailed by thoughts and feelings which I don't consider at all desirable?

A: One who has proceed towards Badri-Narayana along mountain paths crossing one mountain range after another. While journeying one sometimes has to ascend high peaks. When one reaches a high peak one's mind is filled with joy, the pure mountain air cleanses the

mind and body; the lovely scenes that one sees on both sides of the way fills one's heart with inexpressible delight. All objects that are seen below are visible over a wide region; these objects appear very small and trivial. The mind, in such a state, naturally expands. Nevertheless, if the traveler stops there, he cannot have the vision of Badri-Narayana. One must continue the journey, and in so doing one has to descend from the high mountain peaks. When one gets down to the foot of the hill and looks up at the peak one has left behind, one feels: "how high up I was before and how low down I am now!" Compared to the hill tops so full of light and fresh air, this foot of the hill appears closed on all sides; nothing can be seen, as if one has fallen into the bottom of a sky-high mountain peak. But this downward descent too is not perpetual. Again one climbs up to the hill top, then one goes down to the foot – he goes on repeating this process. Thus ascending to the high summit and then descending below, one at last arrives at the feet of Śrī Badri-Narayana. But one has to traverse frequently steep hill sides in order to get to the hill top – which is very difficult; the ascent is difficult; it takes a long time for one to climb up the steep incline. For some the climb is easy, for others it is a hard one; others yet cannot climb at all and have to travel in a carriage. While descending, on the other hand, down the hill side the body seems to go down of itself as it were, in a short while, the same is true of pilgrims who take to the path that leads to God: he too has to proceed through continuous ascent and descent. When the mind is dominated by sattva-guṇa, sādhana goes on smoothly and uninterruptedly; craving for sense-enjoyments, absorption in thought about sense-object – all these almost cease; the mind is filled to the brim with purity and blissful serenity. One develops a natural taste and inclination for salutary utterances and good deeds.

Living in the company of and service to good souls, reading good books, discussing good subjects, thinking good thoughts – passing one's days in such activities and occupations tends to increase sattva-guṇa. Living in the company of bad people, of worldly and voluptuous persons, on the other hand, tends to weaker sattva-guṇa resulting in dominance of tamas and rajas. Rajo-guṇa makes one mad for sensual enjoyments while tamo-guṇa plunges one in the spiritual blindness caused by sinful pleasures and evil thoughts. This is why all the śāstras and spiritually elevated persons have unanimously enjoined repetition of sacred names and the company of good souls is seldom easy to have; besides, it is hard to ascertain who these really good souls are. If it is not possible to have the company of genuinely good souls, there is no

dearth of good books. Make it a point to spend your time in the company of good books, to perform all your duties in a spirit of service to God and to practice nāma-japa – you will attain real (spiritual) well-being. You may not have initially a taste for all these things; nevertheless, you will come to like them gradually as one does with (taking) drugs which are unpalatable at first. Just as one has to climb up a steep hill-side in order to reach the summit but gets delight when he reached it, so the traveler along the road to Divine has to force his mind to be led in a direction opposite to that of sense-enjoyment towards tyāga – a process that culminates in ānanda.

The road to downfall, to sense-enjoyment is straight and easy; for the mind has been habituated to sense pleasures and thoughts about sense-objects for an infinite period of time; hence, movement along the path is natural for him. Once this downward path is found one goes down as easily as one does down a hill side. Exerting oneself repeatedly and to the utmost and following the injunctions of the Guru with utmost devotion and unquestioningly – it is thus alone that the state of sāttvika purity will gradually become settled. Till this happens, however, there is no reason to despair. If contrary thoughts and feelings arise you should repeat the nāma with an effort of will, forcing yourself to do so; at the same time you must try your utmost to stop all thoughts of sense-enjoyment. Don't allow yourself to give way to temptation whenever an opportunity offers itself for enjoyment of sense pleasures. Earnestly you should pray to God saying: "O God! Don't you see I am very much week? My Lord! You see I am unable to stand the impact of the beauty in which you have manifested yourself before my eyes; it renders me helpless, rushes me along as in a flood. Kindly be gracious to me and withhold this lovely form of yours." You will see God will at once conceal His lovely form, He will, as it were, feel ashamed of Himself, seeing that you have found Him out, seen Him through, so to speak; He alone exists; there is nothing else. He appears to the bhakta (devotee) in many forms to test him. So firmly get hold of Him, in all forms, in all ideas and feelings.

Q: We read in the Purāṇas how great sages and ṛṣis would be engaged n severely ascetic penance (tapasyā) – so severe that we can hardly believe them, let alone comprehend. Their ascetic austerities would often be violently disturbed by the frolics of celestial nymphs (apsarās); lured by the latter, these sages would be plunged in a life of wild sensual enjoyment and carnal

pleasures. If they could have a fall after such long and arduous tapasyā we, ordinary mortals have little to hope for. Are we then doomed?

A: It is usually those who engage in sādhana & tapasyā fully confident in their ability to achieve self-realization, omnipotence through hard penance – it is those who usually suffered a fall. Indeed, how can we presume to attain the infinitely powerful Īśvara through infinitely small powers. Can the flower fly ever salute the Sun? It is only he to whom the omnipotent Paramātman (the supreme Self) graciously reveals Himself knows Him, attains Him. No other process, no amount of ascetic austerity is a complete means of attaining Him. Nevertheless, tapasyā is necessary – for self-purification, for cleaning of the mind. For, it is only the purified soul that is capable of receiving His grace. Even a fall ultimately leads to the spiritual well-being of the sādhaka. Such a fall makes one realize one's weakness. He realizes that he is utterly incapable by himself to grasp and to know the Infinite. Spiritual downfall opens one's eyes to one's real nature; as a consequence of this, the sādhaka becomes free from egoism and thus becomes whole-heartedly dedicated to the Divine and the Guru. To the genuinely devoted and dedicated person God readily offers refuge and protection. A genuine bhakta who is totally dedicated to Him and therefore free from egoism, never suffers a fall.

Q: If one, without getting himself initiated to a Guru, leads a good life and keeps a good moral character and invokes God – will he not have a vision of Him?

A: Those who keep a good moral character but have not had initiation from a Guru may advance spiritually but cannot attain final realization. When their time will come He Himself will provide them with a Guru. Dīkṣā (initiation is necessary for God realization. Those who have done so (achieved realization) have all followed this path; there is no other. After dīkṣā, the disciple imbibes the Guru's power (śakti). The Guru-śakti has come down in a continuous, un-interrupted spiritual succession (paramparā). That śakti lodges itself in a particular human body; it is this śakti that is the real Guru; it is this Guru-śakti incarnate (in a human body) that will lead him along (the way to salvation). It is only where this śakti is present that where one should turn for initiation.

Q: Is not possible to void the mind of all objects and achieve self-realization without resorting to the Sāṃkhya way of Yoga?

A: It is not possible to render the mind object-less and achieve Brahman-realization through yogic processes like prāṇāyāma. So long as the craving for sense enjoyment persists, how can the mind be free from thoughts about worldly objects.

Q: How is the distracted mind focused? (How can it be one-pointed?)

A: There is a yoga-sūtra. In the yoga-sūtras of Patanjali: "japaḥ svādhyāyeśvarapraṇidhāṇāni kṛyā yogaḥ. Tapas (practice of austerities), svādhyāya and īśvarapraṇidhāṇa – these are kṛyā-yoga." Tapas means the effort to keep the body clean, to get rid of all distortions and aberrations of the senses like lust, anger, malice etc. through strict regulation of eating and sleeping and other physical activities; svādhyāya means the reading of the sacred text like Upanisad and nāma-japa; īśvarapraṇidhāṇa means the offering of all acts and their fruits to Īśvara, knowing that He is the Supreme Controller of all actions and movements in the universe and ceasing to feel and think that one is doing anything himself.

Q: "Give me money, give me fame" – are prayers of this kind which ask for something, right?

A: If while asking for such things one is drawn towards God, meditates on Him and prays to Him earnestly, one's mind is purified. Sometimes God fulfils these desires; indeed, this is the reason why one feels drawn towards Him. When love for Him is generated one ceases to ask for anything from Him. Even those who worship Him to fulfill worldly desires will eventually develop bhakti for Him.

Q: Has watching ārati any special significance?

A: The original term for ārati is ārātrika. He who is beyond our vision, who is without a form, has graciously assumed a form, which is an object we can meditate on.

Q: Sometimes it so happens that from behind the assembled throng one cannot watch the ārati; can one at that time meditate with closed eyes?

A: Yes, of course one can do so. During ārati He reveals His own divine form. This is why the value of watching ārati is great! Even when you cannot see the image of the Deity during ārati you should inwardly meditate on Him.

Q: How can one dispel the fear of death?

A: Fear of death springs from infatuation caused by self-identification with the physical body. Everything that exists belongs to God, there is nothing that is really my own; and yet the feeling that worldly possessions, relations with other persons who are close to us are mine – that is infatuation which is rooted in ignorance. Even the body of mine does not belong to me, I am not its owner; that a person has the firm, immovable belief that this body is his own is the chief cause of suffering of the jīva.

In the degree in which one's sense of identity with the body as the self diminishes and the feeling that all actions in the world are fully under the dispensation of God grows and ripens fear of death loses its hold. Persist in the practice of bhajana with the utmost tenacity and earnestness. As you do so your attachment to money and other worldly possessions will begin to diminish; you will be able then to give away things freely. Then one's attachment to one's wife, children and other relations will begin to weaken; you will even cease to suffer anguish at their decease. And then, finally, even one's attachment towards one's own body will gradually cease; then, and only then, even fear of death will diminish and gradually disappear.

Once there was a king who being free from all delusions was named Nirmoha. Once his son went to a forest where he met a saint (mahātmā). When asked about his identity the son replied , - "I am the son of the king Nirmoha". Hearing such a strange name, the saint was astonished and said "I must test him and see how nirmoha (free from delusions) he is". Smearing the clothes with blood the sādhu then came to the king and said, "your son has been killed while hunting. Look, here are his clothes." The king said in reply: "I have no son. Please sit down." The sādhu then went into the inner apartments of the palace, met the queen and showed her

the blood-stained clothes. The queen too said : " I have no son." When he approached the king's daughter-in-law, she too said : "I have no husband." The sādhu then realized that all members of the royal family were free from worldly attachment – nirmoha. None of them felt any sort of identity with the physical body.

Q: I have read in "The Life of Śrī Śrī Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj" that after his demise the countenance of Śrī Śrī Rādhābiharījī (Lord Kṛṣṇa) looked terrible and from the eyes of Śrījī (Goddess Rādhā) flowed a liquid substance resembling tears incessantly; as a result her eyes became distorted.

Śrī Śrī Kathia Babaji Maharaj had become one with the Paramātman; for him, to remain in the body or outside was the same; so, departing from the mortal body his soul was merged in the Supreme. Besides, he was one with both Thakurji and Śrījī who were both above all sorrows and sufferings. If so, why did Thakurji look so terrible and why did tears rolled down the cheeks of Śrījī ceaselessly?

A: It is true that Śrī Śrī Kathia Babaji Maharaj is one with Brahman, that there was no difference between Him and the Divine. Nevertheless, he was incarnate in a physical body. Thakurji and Śrījī are both present here in this temple in embodied forms. At the passing away of someone who is dear to one it is natural for one to feel sorrow and pain(of bereavement); it is natural for embodied beings. Although Kathia Babaji Maharaj was one with God, partaking of the very nature of the Divine, in his human līlā with Thakurji and Śrījī, both of them manifested in their body all the visible signs of sorrow caused by bereavement of a dear one; it is natural for incarnate beings. This is just as when the tongue secretes saliva when it is brought close to an edible object with a sour taste, for tasting food is the natural function of the tongue. Sorrow at the bereavement of a near and dear one is natural for an embodied being; this is why signs of sorrow were manifested in the bodies of both Thakurji and Śrījī. A male body is naturally hard compared to a female body which is naturally soft; this is why in his effort to suppress with extreme patience and fortitude, there was violent onset of sorrow; there were no tears; that anguish, however, expressed itself in his face and body. The body of Śrījī being tender and soft; so, it was not quite capable of suppressing the onrush of sorrow which, in consequence, flowed out in streams of tear and damaged her eyes.

He is the body as well as the embodied being. It is He who dwells in all names, all forms and all bodies. He is also and at the same time present everywhere as the detached spectator and the Ātman (Self) of all. Though One in His essence, He has become many in His cosmic play; infinite as He is, this cosmic play of His is also infinite. And yet, He is beyond all names and forms, and as such He is one without a second, whole and undivided, undifferentiated and absolutely homogeneous in His essential Bliss. He is infinitely diverse in His multiplicity of manifested forms and yet as One He is ekarasa (uniform and homogeneous in His essential nature as Bliss). When He became embodied, He strictly conforms to the ways of all incarnate beings. There is a difference here, nevertheless: the body of a jīva is ruled and regulated by karma while the body of a god is entirely controlled by the wish of the latter; He assumes a body for the sake of līlā (play) – līlāyopattavigrahaḥ. When the jīva is freed from his thralldom to karma which binds him to saṃsāra, his ātman merges into the Paramātman, becomes one with Him. It is the One who becomes Many; the multiplicity constitutes His cosmic play. When the bondage of karma is ended, the body of an illumined soul becomes like the body of a divine being for the purpose of līlā, and hence, their bodily forms too are worshipped like divine image. When Śrī Śrī Kathia Babaji Maharaj once came to Calcutta Kṣīrod-babu prayed to him to pay a visit to his home. Śrī Śrī Babaji Maharaj granted his prayer and so, arrangements were made for his visit. In a room of the house an oil painting of Babaji Maharaj was kept on a raised seat. In the room, an āsana (seat) was placed. Both the portrait and the āsana were adorned with floral wreaths.

Śrī Śrī Babaji Maharaj approached the door of the room, and then, prostrated himself on the floor before his own portrait. Later, when he was asked why he prostrated himself before his own portrait, he replied with a smile: My dear son! This portrait of yours has indeed become one with the Divine. It should be noted here that he would often refer to himself as "thou". "I" and "thou" were the same to him. One with Brahman, he was equally present everywhere; again, at the same time he was, in his all-transcendent, all-surpassing state, one undivided divine consciousness (cit). To him there was no distinction between his own body and that of another, no difference, in other word, between "I" and "other"; hence, wherever there is an exalted manifestation of the Divine he offers his whole-hearted, unreserved salutation.

Q: Do even those who are spiritually fulfilled, who are great souls (mahātmā) feel infatuation with the physical body at the time of death?

A: Not at all, my son! They know perfectly well that this body is nothing but dead matter; they leave this body with joy. The gods themselves come down to receive him (to take him to the worlds above). However, owing to the saṃskāras accumulated through countless births they may experience some fear; some other physical symptoms may also manifest themselves. But such delusions in their case are momentary; for, knowing fully well the blessed realms which are their destinations, they become free from all infatuations and experience delight.

Q: In the case of those who have received initiation from a Sadguru their gurus appear before them at the time of death and take them up with them – isn't it so?

A: Yes, they will come and show themselves, but not in the case of all. He will remain invisible to those who have still to exhaust their karma and undergo bhoga; he will take them after they have gone through their remaining bhoga.

Q: Will all your disciples have the 'vision of God'?

A: Yes, my son! They will.

Q: In this (present) birth?

A: No, my son! Some of them will, no doubt, attain it in this birth; but no one will be left behind. Among those who will not make it in this birth, many will make considerable advance, and everyone of them will certainly make some progress in varying degrees.

Q: Is it possible for one who has not been a brāhmaṇa to achieve liberation?

A: Everybody can attain release from bondage by worshipping Him by sincerely doing his own (prescribed) work. This has been clearly said in the Gītā in ślokas such as this: "sve sve karmaṇyabhirataḥ saṃsiddhim labhate naraḥ", "svakarmaṇā tamabhyarcya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ". All that ultimately matters is one's state of mind, one's attitude to life; if this attitude is the right one, if, that is to say, one does everything in a spirit of service to God, then even the

sweeper advances towards the final goal of man – mukti – by cleaning the latrines, just as brāhmaṇas will do through the performance of their own perennial karma such as the practice of ceremonial sacrifices and holy rights. No one will make any spiritual progress if the attitude of mind, the state of consciousness is not the right one. Spiritual downfall is inevitable if one feels contempt towards others by making invidious distinction, noble and humble. "Without being born as a brāhmaṇa one cannot attain liberation" – such a view is perfectly untenable. There are some brāhmaṇa pundits who interpret the śāstras in a distorted manner to exalt themselves. That's nothing. How then one is to explain the spiritual excellence of a man like Dharma-vyādha? It is recorded in the śāstras that one who was born as an elephant had attained liberation. If this is so, is there any room for doubt all men and women, irrespective of one's origin can achieve mukti. If you happened to be born in a brāhmaṇa family God expects more from you than from others. The spiritual advance you will make by exerting yourself much, others will make with much less exertion. Suppose someone who has a hundred thousand rupees donates a thousand rupees; another who has, on the other hand, only five rupees but gives away the whole amount. Who do you think deserves more credit? The one who has a hundred thousand has parted with only a small amount, whereas, the one who has only five rupees has given away all he had.

Q: There are many great men who affirm that India is dharmabhūmi – the land of religion and spirituality – is it true?

A: Yes, it's true. Is there anything surprising in that? Diversity is the rule in this world. Every leaf of a tree has something unique and special about it. The children born of the same parents, for instance, have each of them a distinctive character. Similarly, every country possesses a distinctive character of its own. Fruits of a dry kind grow naturally in Kabul (Afghanistan) – as the saying goes. So India is the land of religion; that is the distinguishing characteristic of India.

Q: Who is real vaiṣṇava?

A: A vaiṣṇava is one who worships Lord Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu means "all pervading". Selflessly to serve and not to hurt any creature – that is the first lesson of Vaiṣṇavism. If you feel irreverence

to any other Deity, you haven't understood the real meaning of Viṣṇu. Indeed, Lord Viṣṇu is the ultimate resting place and support of all. One should try to look upon every object, every creature as Brahman. In your intercourse with everybody you should mentally establish in him the śakti of Viṣṇu – this is the prescription that is laid down by the śāstras for all vaiṣṇavas.

Śrī Śrī Santadasji Mharaj had profound respect for Śrī Śrī Vijaykrishna Goswami. One day, a gentlemen came and after prostrating himself before Maharajji said that he was the great disciple of Śrī Śrī Vijaykrishna Goswami. At this, Santadasji appeared to be filled with delight; he also seemed tenderly and affectionately disposed towards him; it was like what happens when we suddenly meet a person extremely dear to us after a long time. In a voice overflowing with affection he said : Oh! So he (Śrī Śrī Vijaykrishna Goswami) was your great Guru? From whom did you get initiation? The gentleman mentioned the name of his Guru. Greatly pleased Maharajji continued: my son! You haven't been deceived. The spiritual seed you have received is infallible – it is certain to bear fruit. If the potential power of this seed has not fully manifested itself, it may do so in you. This power has come to you in a continuous line of descent – it is unfailing in its effect.

Q: But it is not that he used to give the same mantra to all – isn't it?

A: That makes no difference to the effect, my son! The great sage Narada received from his great Guru Sanatkumara a mantra consisting of eighteen letters (syllables); and he himself gave his disciples Dhruva and Prahlada a mantra which consists of twelve letters. When one has attained fulfillment in one particular mahā-mantra he can give another mantra too. Don't entertain the least doubt about this. The power that you have received is unfailing.

You have got the refuge of a great soul. He will on no account let you go without imparting to you the nature of his own self. It is the nature of a great soul – to impart his own essential being, to make his own. Look at the mother earth – see how she assimilates everything including filthy substances like urine and excreta of creatures so that everything is ultimately reduced to earth, obliterating all distinctions. The same holds good of great souls. Do you know what it means for a Sadguru to make a chela (disciple)? It means: to establish his own Guru in the heart of the śiṣya. Goswamiji used to say – " I have established Paramahamsaji (his own Guru) in the heart

of many people. It is the duty of the disciple (sisya) to try to establish communion with the Guru through spiritual exercises like nāma-japa and other ways.

Q: Maharaj! I visited you at the last Kumbha-mela in Prayag (Allahabad).

A: It may be so, my son. Many things now slip off my memory.

Q: Maharaj! Did many exalted souls come to the Kumbha-mela?

A: Listen, my son! Once, at a Kumbha-mela, Abhay-babu (one of his brother disciples) asked Babaji Maharaj (Śrī Śrī Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj) – "whether great bhaktas like Dhruva & Prahlada had come to the mela." He replied – "yes, many have come; some of them are even greater than Dhruva and Prahlada; but how can you perceive it without (spiritual) eyes?" But, my son, they come very secretly; may be, one of them is seen selling a huge bundle of grass. It is quite the capacity of ordinary men to recognize them.

Q: Maharaj! Did they come in the last Kumbha-mela?

A: (With firmness) Yes, they did. They certainly make their appearance at Purna-Kumbha (full-fledged melas which are held every three years at four different places in India and every twelve years at the same place). Otherwise, who do you think run these colossal assemblages of hundreds of thousands of people! You must have seen how arrangements have to be made for the feeding of hundreds of thousands of people. Is that an easy job? And the meals that are provided are by no means ordinary ones. These are rendered possible only through their power.

Q: (One of the listeners) Maharaj! Is this a conjecture of yours or something that you witnessed yourself.

A: (addressing the grand-disciple of Goswamiji) Don't disbelieve it my son! Its true. Please don't ask me more about it. I won't say anything more on this subject. But you told me you are the son of Goswamiji, so I tell you for your well-being: In the last Kumbha-mela in Prayaga (Allahabad) Goswamiji came.

Q: (The original gentleman) Did he come in the gross body or the subtle body?

In reply to this question the revered Maharaj-ji tried at first to explain the matter by saying that there is, in reality no difference between coming in the gross and the subtle body. Pressed further on the matter, he said: When I said he came, you should understand that he came in the gross body; otherwise, the Ātman is present everywhere in a subtle form. But on this matter I won't say anymore. Believe me – the mahātmās (great souls) have not abandoned you, they have not forgotten you.

Q: After having been born in a human body may one be born in a sub-human (animal) body? The theosophists tell us after being born in a human body one does not assume a sub-human body. Is it true?

A: Why not? If one's karma resembles that of birds and animals one will naturally be born as a bird or a beast! Note further, my son! Eating, sleeping and copulating – all these physical activities are common to men and beasts. If, even while in the human body, you are wholly pre-occupied with these physical activities alone and do nothing else, then, even in this body of yours you are no more than a bird or a beast!

Besides, there are recognized incidents which demonstrate how a human body has assumed an animal body in the next birth. In the Hooghly district of Bengal, a certain school teacher was attacked with leprosy. Bhudev Babu (Bhudev Mukhopadhyay) dismissed him from service on account of this disease. He was then seized with the desire to visit the temple of Shiva at Tarakeshwar, and undertake a fast unto death unless the prayer is granted. In a dream Father Tarakeshwar forbade him to go to through the ordeal. When, in spite of this, he was preparing himself for the ordeal, Lord Tarakeshwar appeared to him in a dream again and told him that in his last birth he had, siding him with his wife, kicked his mother. In her next birth, his mother was born as a cow in a certain house at a certain village of Barisal district of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). If the cow mother forgave him he might recover.

The leper questioned Shiva in this dream: how he would recognize which among the cows was his mother. Lord Shiva said that in the cow-shed of the said gentleman there were many cows;

of these the one who, on seeing the leper would fly into a violent rage and would attempt to attack him would be his mother. You would recover from your disease if you could placate her by rendering service to her. After a long and laborious search the teacher arrived at last at the house of the aforesaid gentleman in Barisal district and, taking the latter's permission entered the cow-shed. In the cow-shed he found a large number of cows tied to posts with ropes. None of them did anything to the teacher. But there was one cow among them who, the moment she saw him, flew into a violent rage and tried fiercely to goad him by wildly stretching at the rope. The teacher realized that she was his mother. Coming close to her he was about to caress her, but she started jumping so violently that it looked as though she would kill him if she could free herself. The teacher, with the permission of the master of the house, began to serve the cow mother everyday tenderly. He would feed her with fresh grass gathered by himself; caress her; dispose of her urine and excreta; drive off flies and mosquitoes. The cow at first would not even allow her to draw near her; the moment she saw him she started jumping and stumping the ground violently. After some days, being tenderly served by the teacher, her resentment towards him diminished. Towards the end she would even lick his body tenderly. As a result of this licking the leper gradually recovered from his dreadful disease.

So, even after human birth, one may be born as a sub-human creature as a consequence of his karma.

Q: Heaven, hell, Candraloka (The world of the Moon), Sūryaloka (The world of the Sun) – do these really exist?

A: Yes, my son! They are real. The states of jīvas after death are determined by their karma. You may, in this body of yours, perform acts which are so good that the happiness you will get as a result will be of such intensity that you will not be able to sustain it (in this body). Do you understand what this means? The amount of happiness may indeed be so great that under its strain this body will totally break down and dissolve. Once a poor man received one hundred thousand rupees in the Derby (lotteries). As soon as he got the news he died – for the intensity of joy was more than he could bear. This is natural. So, after death you will get a body which is fit to enjoy the happiness that you have deserved (by virtue of your karma); and thus you will go to the higher worlds (like Chandraloka, Sūryaloka etc.) which are suitable as abodes of these

bodies. As the period of bhoga comes to an end you will get another body and go to another world. Again, in this body of yours, you may commit evil deeds of such magnitude as a consequence of which you will undergo pain and suffering of so great intensity that you will not be able to stand it (in this body). After death you will get a body that is capable of undergoing such extreme pain and you will go to places like hell which are suitable abodes for such bodies. These are all real, not lies. In this infinite universe there are infinite varieties of cosmic phenomena; all these are His play.

Q: Theosophists tell us about the existence of various worlds like Pretaloka, Bhūrloka, Bhuvarloka and so on. After death, human beings, as they develop, go to these higher realms and finally attain liberation. Is this view correct?

A: No, my son; this is not what our ṛṣis tell us. True, there exists a variety of worlds. The ṛṣis declare that after death, a man, assuming a body in accordance with his karma go to various worlds fit for such bodies to live in, and thus experience happiness or suffering (sorrow). These are other worlds which are chiefly meant for bhoga (experience of various kinds). After the termination of bhoga he has to come back to this world of ours whereby undertaking sādhana (through spiritual effort) he advances spiritually. Liberation (mukti) can be achieved only here in this world, not in any other world.

Q: Where does the departed soul go after death?

A: To Chandraloka, generally. Highly developed souls, after passing through the world of the sun (Sūryaloka) go to higher realms. Liberated souls go to Vaikuṇṭha which is above and beyond the Dhruva-maṇḍala (which is named after the pole star, Dhruva).

Q: By performing shrāddha (a religious ceremony performed for the well-being of a departed soul) at Gaya does one get liberated?

A: The liberation that is achieved by performing shrāddha at Gaya means freedom from suffering in hell.

Q: Does bhoga take place in the subtle body?

A: Just as experience of happiness and misery takes place in the gross body, so does it in the subtle one. There is joy as well as sorrow which are so subtle that cannot be experienced in the gross body.

Q: Sometimes we travel in distant lands in dreams. What about this? Does the indwelling soul pass out of the body on such occasions or does it only see what exists within the body itself?

A: Both are possible; you know, as the saying goes: what is in the macrocosm is also in the microcosm (literally – "what is in the universe is also in a small earthen vessel"). This body too is like a whole cosmos – everything is here. It is possible therefore to travel to many places within this body itself. Besides, it is possible and true that the indwelling soul sometimes passes out of the body. In this connection, I am going to relate an experience of my own – listen. I was at that time at Shrihaṭṭa. I heard that electric tram-car had just started to ply in Calcutta. I thought when I go to Calcutta I shall see something new there. It was a holiday; during a nap in the afternoon I dreamt: "I have gone to Calcutta; I am waiting at a stop on the road for the new tram which I had already seen. After a short while a friend of mine turned up there. Both of us boarded the tram, and after travelling a small distance, got down. I then visited a few other places in Calcutta, and then I woke up". When I woke up from the dream I felt weak and exhausted. A few days later, I received a letter from my friend, Shrinath Das, who was in Calcutta. He wrote to me – "It is a matter of great regret for me that you had come to Calcutta and left without visiting us. I am both shocked and surprised at this. How could you, I wonder, forget us so soon?" We were close friends and passed many days together. He too had joined the same yogic community of which I was a member. We used to practice bhajana together. I was greatly surprised at receiving the letter. I wrote him back, "Have you turned mad? I didn't go to Calcutta recently, so the question of leaving it without paying a visit to you doesn't arise at all." To this he replied you certainly did come. You boarded the tram with Mr. so and so and you got down at such and such a place. I saw all this with my own eyes." After reading this letter I remembered that afternoon. I realized then that it was not a dream; that I had actually passed out of the body. I had experienced this many times. Even after passing out this body there

always remains a subtle connection with the body which is left behind; it is a very subtle electrical link which makes it possible for the soul to return to the body quickly.

Q: One hears of receiving mantras in a dream. Are these true to fact?

A: Dreams about the Guru, the Gods and great souls are not mere fancies; such dreams often turn out to be true.

Q: According to modern psychology we are in dreams what we think about. Is this view correct?

A: Yes, that's true. Yet on this view we cannot explain everything on every occasion. It sometimes so happens that you suddenly see things you had never seen before. Once, I gave one a mantra without affixing the Praṇava (Oṃ – the sacred syllable). I did it intentionally. He had then not yet had dīkṣā (initiation); I had written down a certain sacred name. One day he saw in a dream, Kathia Babaji Maharaj telling him – "Ah! He (meaning I) didn't affix the Praṇava to the nāma (name)! It would have been well if he had done so." Indeed, he had never thought about it; then how could he have dreamt it. Such dreams are true.

Q: Why don't we get the fruits of pilgrimage?

A: In order to get spiritual benefit from pilgrimage one must abstain from fault-finding. The temple priests are bullying and tyrannizing, others are doing wrong – you must ignore such things. " I have come as a devout pilgrim, I must conduct myself accordingly; I must not find faults in others." If you can adopt this attitude while staying in a holy place, you will reap the benefits of pilgrimage. As far as you can, try to overlook what others do, how they behave. The present age is the age dominated by tamas – so that one's attention is inevitably directed to whatever is bad. It is difficult to acquire such a frame of mind without exercising forcible constraint on it. For sādhana every place has its virtues as well as drawbacks. But if, however, you find fault in others in a holy place you will suffer spiritual degradation. You don't have the right to indulge in fault-finding.

In this world of ours (saṃsāra) men get more pleasure in living in the hope of enjoying themselves than what they actually enjoy in the form of happiness. What sustains them in life is the hope that happiness will come. In what we actually experience in life there is more misery than happiness. Those who are wise and discriminating declare that this saṃsāra is full of nothing but unmitigated suffering. As long as there is desire (vāsanā) there is no real happiness. All the objects that are meant for our happiness cannot gratify us forever. Even after enjoyment of pleasures desire for them persists. But the delight that one enjoys after liberation is inexhaustible, endless. There cannot be any comparison between this delight and that which is offered by saṃsāra – this phenomenal world of ours.

No delight offered by this saṃsāra is everlasting. Though the desire for attending liberation exists at the beginning (at the initial stage), when liberation is achieved at last there is no more any desire for anything. Hence, the desire for mokṣa (liberation) is not at all like mundane desires. Mundane pleasures will drop off through satiety. One should try to get hold of that delight which never changes. One must renounce all objects of enjoyment, all mundane cravings. But this renunciation must be genuine and earnest. He, whose mind has been rendered subtle and finely discriminating through sādhana practiced in previous births may make rapid (spiritual) progress; but such instances are extremely rare. The craving for enjoyment goes comparatively easily only in the case of those who are exceptionally fortunate, even without undertaking arduous sādhana through constant association with persons whose minds are free from desire.

Q: The happiness one experiences in saṃsāra is transitory; everyone hopes for happiness, and yet, one suffers unhappiness. If so, why doesn't one give up the craving for enjoyment?

A: What man, through sense enjoyment, hankers after is lasting bliss, ānanda. Whatever one does, no matter whether it is good or bad, one does in order to get ānanda. The accumulated saṃskāra (impression) of pleasure, derived from sense-enjoyment has come down to us through many births, countless lives. Bondage is the result of this saṃskāra, and it is this saṃskāra that causes attachment. To get rid of these saṃskāras, one must exert oneself for a long, long period of time. "The saṃskāras belong to God, I am only doing His service" –

this idea must be generated; believing firmly that this entire universe is His, and thus trying to view every object, every creature as divine, one should regard himself as a humble servant (of God). He who can live with this conviction cannot be thwarted by anybody. Exert yourself to the utmost of your capacity; God will see that this person is trying his utmost. Thus believing firmly that this saṃsāra belongs to Him, that all forms, all objects and creatures are His forms, that this saṃsāra is not meant for sense-enjoyment but for service (to Him) – holding this conviction firmly one should sanctify this saṃsāra.

As far as you can, don't, by word and deed, hurt the feelings of others. Examine carefully; everything you do, devote yourself to the service (sevā) of others. If the person you have served happens not to be pleased, don't worry or get disturbed. It is true that if you find that one is pleased through your service, you feel greater pleasure, but this feeling too is attributable, in the ultimate analysis, to your sense of ego (ahaṃ). You are a servant of God; so, your one and only aim ought to be the pleasure of God. You should try to get ānanda without any attachment to any object of this world. You must try to drive away all mundane cravings that dwell within. The essential thing is to give up all attachment. What I mean here is not mere external renunciation; it must come from within. Always remember, for achieving real happiness you don't require any object of this world (saṃsāra). If attachment goes, it makes no difference whether one remains in saṃsāra or outside it (after renouncing the world). After this state of non-attachment is achieved, he who continues performing all acts is called a yogī, and he who renounces is called a sannyāsī.

Q: Throughout our lives, all of us are serving the saṃsāra; as a result of this, our infatuation and attachment are increasing and we are suffering all the time. Why?

A: It's because you don't believe that this saṃsāra is His. If one is convinced that this saṃsāra does not belong to God, neither delusion nor attachment of any kind can arise. If one can feel, "I am all the time serving God" – sorrow or suffering cannot exist, the heart is filled with delight.

Our method of sādhanā is to try to see in every object and every creature the Divine, to feel the presence of Brahman everywhere.

Wherever this feeling of the presence of Brahman will be evoked (aroused), even if it is just a point or an infinite void – hold on to it; there is no question of any forcible imposition here. Only, that which you thus hold on to must be believed in as the Divine Himself. That will bear fruit. He is fully there in every manifested form; it is He who has manifested Himself as the Great Void, the infinitely small point, the form of every object. From every object where you firmly believe God is present, He will respond. Indeed, He is present everywhere; only, He reveals Himself where you believe Him to be present. If one can thus fully convince himself that Brahman is everywhere, saṃsāra ceases to be the cause of bondage.

All is His līlā. The less of ill-will towards others you have in your heart, the more you will be able to concentrate your mind during meditation; otherwise, it (ill-will) will not allow you to concentrate. If one doesn't realize that God is present in others, all (spiritual) efforts will go in vain; it will be like pouring ghee on ashes. Worship whichever form of the Deity appeals to you, but don't harbour uncharitable feeling towards those who worship other forms of the Deity. Prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā (the infusion of prāṇa) means to establish the presence of the sense of divinity in the image, to invoke the all-pervading Divine, so that it becomes a settled conviction in you. By constant meditation on the stone image (of the Deity) with love and devotion, Power (śakti) will manifest itself in the image, it is like the cow's milk revealing itself (flowing out of the udder) to the calf. Attracted by this manifestation of power, people in large numbers flock to it (the image).This power which dwells in the receptacle sometimes appear in it, sometimes disappears. You for instance, have various powers in you, but when you are asleep these powers too, sleep – become dormant; when you wake up, they again manifest themselves. One should meditate on the Sadguru as well as the divine image with full conviction of their divinity. As one goes on doing this, God begins to reveal Himself everywhere.

Q: What is the way of getting bhakti – love and devotion towards God?

A: For that two things are absolutely necessary: (1) the company of persons who are bhaktas and (2) reading books which evoke bhakti; reading, for instance, the lives of great bhaktas.

Bhakti does not come through merely speaking about God. The greatness of God, the infinite variety of His līlā, inconceivable magnitude of His power – one must reflect on these matters deeply. Realization of the essential greatness of any object instantaneously arouses bhakti. How much power is needed to rear a plant – just think about it! How the plant extracts from the earth the vital ingredients – the plant itself does not know the power that is at work at the back of it all; it baffles our mind to think about the infinite ingenuity and complexity that has gone into the process. Have you ever thought about the mystery of this human body, the stupendous amount of intelligence that is necessary for the building of this body of yours? It is utterly beyond our thought and imagination – the tremendous intellectual power that is required to bring this about. If one could really grasp the extent and magnitude of this power, one's mind would naturally be overwhelmed by bhakti. If one's thought continues to flow one's mind would be struck with profound admiration and speechless wonder. If the mind is engrossed in the thought about how the universe came into being, if the mind is bewildered and overwhelmed by one's inability to conceive the infinite power of God, bhakti naturally arises. What is needed is expansion of the mind combined with humility, that arises from the thought: "This cosmic creation is utterly incomprehensible to me – His infinite power, endless līlā, illimitable Creation – all this is beyond our intellect." As the Taittirīya Upaniṣad speaking about Brahman, says: "That from which speech returns utterly baffled along with the mind"; if this feeling truly comes bhakti arises naturally, spontaneously. Our minds, however, do not tend that way; that's the trouble. For this one must exert oneself; otherwise the good saṃskāras do not sink in. Knowledge comes first, then comes attraction; that is bhakti. With the advent of pure knowledge, the purified heart will inevitably bring in bhakti.

Q: Desire and anger are the root causes of mental distraction. How can one conquer them?

A: This saṃsāra originates from sexual desire. If this force (of sexual desire) had not been there as an integral part of the Divine Himself, this Creation (of saṃsāra) would have vanished. You must not, therefore, feel contempt for those who manifest it. The more you try to suppress it, the more will it overpower you. One should face it with all humility with folded hands. "I am weak, I cannot withstand your irresistible power. Lord, extend to me your protection. If you, O

Lord, want to allure my weak body and mind, who will protect me?" – if one thus becomes afflicted with agonized despair towards God, carnal desire can be easily conquered. You won't be able to achieve it (conquest of lust) by yourself, trying to forcibly subdue it; its force is terrible. "It is like the Great Mother Herself; the cosmic manifestation has emanated from It." - once this attitude becomes settled, lust will go easily. I tell you this from my own personal experience.

From the point of view of knowledge the essence of the matter is this: sexual desire arises from the idea that the female body is meant for enjoyment. All forms are His forms. If one meditates on the forms of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as the divine couple, lust will cease to exist. But this will not happen if one views the dual form as that of ordinary mortals. Besides, there is a bīja-mantra (the letter or syllable which constitutes the essential part of a mantra) of kāma. The japa of bīja-mantra is beneficial.

One need not be anxious for the conquest of kāma. Through the sustained practice of japa with earnest devotion the force of kāma and krodha (desire and anger) will gradually diminish. The physical contact between man and woman is not so much a matter of sin or merit (pāpa-puṇya) as one of social propriety or impropriety; it is in society that a lapse in this regard is condemned as reprehensible. A brother disciple of mine was extremely devoted to his sādhana. It was learnt later that he was infatuated by a woman. After the death of that brother disciple Babaji Maharaj (my Guru) remarked: He has more bhoga in store. That infatuation did him no harm. The natural functions of the body must have their way. What does it matter to you? You should keep yourself separate from them and mentally detach. If you have no craving for enjoyment, whatever and how much may come can do no harm to you. But if their arises in your mind the slightest desire for enjoyment, if you indulge and foster your pernicious but innate propensities like lust, anger, avarice and so on for your own happiness – it is then that you are really guilty of a lapse.

Try to give up all desires in all matters. These physical propensities like kāma (lust) are all His powers, His forms. There is no reason, on this account, for fear and worry. Until the mind becomes perfectly still, and the outlet of the seminal fluid has been stopped, this physical urge (propensity) is aroused and thus affects the mind. Sometimes this powerful urge is stirred, resulting in discharge of seminal fluid. On the eleventh day of the moon (counting from the new

and the full moon) and on the day of the full moon there arise in the body tidal waves, as it were, of carnal feelings (urges); seminal discharge is the natural consequence. It is on account of this the ṛṣis of old have forbidden full meals containing rice on those days for rice is full of juice (rasa), which increases the rasa (fluid) of the body. Fasting reduces this rasa of the body. Most of the rules, like observance of ceremonial abstentions and fasting that has been laid by the ṛṣis with the one object of retention of the semen. Sexual continence – retention of the seminal fluid – is of the essence of brahmacarya. Until one becomes ūrdharetas (one who has physical sublimated the seminal principle) seminal discharge will persist.

You will remember how Sanatana Goswami even at the age of sixty, once suffered from nocturnal emission and consequent discharge of the seminal fluid. At this he was seized with despair; he bitterly reproached himself and cursed his life. He thought: "I am now sixty years old, my body is worn with age; and yet I am unable to rid myself of this horrid propensity. Fie on this detestable tendency of mind, this body of mine! What's the use of retaining this polluted body? I must give it up." Determined thus to give up his life he went to the Yamuna, slowly stepped into the river; when he was plunged up to the neck in the water, he suddenly noticed a gopī who was trying to fill a pitcher with a hole in it. As soon as the pitcher was lifted up the water was pouring down through the hole. When she lifted up again the same thing was repeated – water streamed out of the hole. Thus the gopī was seen filling the pitcher over and over again and the water pouring out of it after it was lifted up. Yet, in spite of this the gopī didn't desist; she went on repeating her futile exercise. It was then that Sanatana Goswami turned to her and said "Mother! Your pitcher has a hole in it. As soon as you are lifting up the pitcher the water is leaking out. Even after knowing this, why are you filling it with water repeatedly? " At this the gopī replied: "Goswami, do you understand that if a pitcher with a hole is filled with water, the water will leak out? Do you believe it? Had you known this you wouldn't have come to Yamuna to give up your life." Saying this, the gopī disappeared. Goswamiji couldn't see her anymore. He was astonished, and after closely examining the words of the gopī he realized their significance.

Sanatana Goswami, as you all know was a deeply devout and ardently loving bhakta. This happened to him in his old age. For this lapse, would it be right to call him licentious or defiled?

Why do you worry yourselves so much? Don't be anxious; all will come right gradually. Try to practice service to God with devotion and loving kindness to all living creatures. Practice and cultivate all these; your mind and heart will be purified.

Q: Sometimes while doing bhajana sexual desire is aroused. Why does it happen?

A: Yes. Above the anus there is a lotus with fourteen petals. Within this lotus there lies kuṇḍalinī (the serpent power). While doing, kuṇḍalinī śakti starts rising upwards. Just beneath the glans-penis there is a six-petalled lotus. Sexual desire is excited; for it is the place for water – the second gross cosmic element (mahābhūta). When this happens, if one first meditates on the ten petalled cakra (or lotus) at the navel called maṇipura and then on the thousand petalled lotus in the (upper part of) head, the kuṇḍalinī at once, leaving that place, comes up to the maṇipura cakra. When this happens lustfulness is at once quenched; for, the centre at the navel is the place for fire – the third cosmic element. Fire absorbs water and so lasciviousness is fully subdued.

For you all these exercises are not necessary; it will cease of itself; don't worry. When you practice bhajana with a steadfast mind, you perceive it yourselves. Nevertheless, even when you are not doing japa this power, kuṇḍalinī is all the time rising up and coming down. After rising some distance it descends again, through the orifice of the spinal cord, to the cakra above the anus; starting to ascend again, pierces the cakra below the glans-penis and continues the ascend. Thus when the kuṇḍalinī goes on ascending after piercing the cakra at the heart centre, it is then and only then, that the sexual urge is quenched. The penis then becomes dried up and light, and the seminal fluid starts rising up. The mind, doesn't get restless easily. It is with the restlessness of the mind the semen too becomes agitated and begins to descend. When the kuṇḍalinī, after piercing the lotus between the eye-brows starts rising upwards that the sādhaka becomes ūrdharetas. It is then, and only then that the channel through which the semen comes down is closed, and, with the disappearance of the sexual urge the mind becomes immobilized and stilled. The sādhaka then becomes fit to attain real ānanda (bliss). Don't worry; fulfillment will come gradually; why should you suffer from restlessness and anxiety.

Q: How is this anger brought under control?

A: The Divine Lord has said in the Gītā: "both kāma (desire) and krodha (anger) have their origin in rajo-guṇa (kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇa samudbhava) – all activities of saṃsāra (phenomenal world) originate from rajo-guṇa (the cosmic principle of movement). There are, however, two kinds of actions prompted by rajo-guṇa controlled by satta-guṇa and those prompted by rajo-guṇa controlled by tamo-guṇa. The sign of sattva-guṇa dominated rajo-guṇa is performing all actions cheerfully. If, for instance, somebody blames you, you won't take it to heart. When rajo-guṇa is dominated by tamas: egoism, malevolence and ill-will. The more the egoism the greater the degree of tamas. The root cause of anger is abhimāṇa (egoism).

In proportion as captiousness regarding the actions of others will diminish, anger will lessen. How does ill will decrease, you are not the real agent of your acts; after all you are not entrusted with action. Whatever act one performs and does as a puppet in the hands of Him, Who is the ultimate cause of all actions, who prompts all actions everywhere in the world. Why should you think it necessary to judge the rights and wrongs of other's faults or merits? I am not the judge of what others are doing; god will judge them. When the mind is thus convinced and settled, malice or anger towards others ceases. If somebody speaks ill of you, don't take it to heart. If you can ignore them (others' faults) anger will lessen - this is the general rule.

Anger is wrong and harmful when it is directed towards another with the intention of doing injury. You chastise your son because he has done something wrong; but it is different; when you punish another in a fit of anger. In the former case the chastisement is outward while within there is love; in the latter there is malice in the heart. There is nothing wrong if you vent anger in punishing those – your children; for instance, whom you have to bring up. It does you no harm if somebody speaks ill of you.

Q: Why does one feel malice towards the actions of others? Does the mind become calm in solitude?

A: God has not made in this saṃsāra two things which are exactly alike; some distinction however slight must exist. It is because such differences exist that all the people in the saṃsāra

do not see eye to eye about any one thing for everybody has his own likes and dislikes. The sense of right and wrong, good or bad, is generated by one's own tastes and predilections. The sense of right or wrong, good or bad, cannot be same in all. This is why for one who lives in society differences opinion become inevitable; it is His dispensation. Though apparently a source of trouble and disturbance, such differences are in the end salutary for both sides. Knowing that differences of opinions are inevitable and seeing it repeated many times, the sādhaka learns to ignore them and adopt a tolerant and patient attitude towards them. Sometimes it so happens that one feels at first a strong urge to protest against something that one regard as a grave fault; later one ceases to feel such an intense dislike for it and learns to ignore it.

One, whose mind has attained such a state of repose that its patience remains unperturbed (patience is never lost) and ceases to feel malice towards any act done by any person – the mind of only such a person, can be said to have become pure. It is such a person alone who is capable of attaining true peace. As a matter of fact he who has become free from malice towards any person or any act, whose mind is not disturbed at finding faults in others' actions – it is such a person alone, who is fit to engage in bhajana through meditation in solitude. No person who has not been free from malice towards any person or any action is really fit for retirement into solitude and single minded devotion to bhajana. If, on the other hand, he adopts a secluded life without being fit for it, his adoption of a life of solitude fails to be wholly effective. What I have said just now is, I assure you, entirely true and in accordance with the śāstras.

Q: Does it mean that we must stop judging and discriminating between right and wrong, good and bad? Isn't this our innate, habitual tendency?

A: Yes. This judging between the right and the wrong – this is indeed what is wrong. When God alone is the real agent of all actions, whom would you find fault with? It is He who is the doer of all that is good; and it is He, again, who is the doer of all that is bad. To think otherwise is the result of ignorance.

It is wrong to find fault with any person. Try to find out what is wrong with <u>you</u> and try to rectify yourself accordingly. God has not sent you here in the role of a judge or a reformer. Instead of

finding faults with others, judging others, turn your attention to yourself, reform your own character. Get rid of your own faults; make your life as a human being fruitful. Remember – God alone is the Controller and the judge of all. How He, leading one along, what ways, gets one to work out his karma, thus bringing about his spiritual progress – what do you understand of all this? Where in you is that vision? Hence, cleanse your own character; you have no need to look after others.

Beware! You must be very careful lest you should indulge yourself in wrongdoing in order to satisfy your own evil propensities, telling yourself all the time that God is the controller of all and so free to do whatever he likes. Persuading yourself thus don't indulge yourself in committing inequities and don't seek opportunities for sense enjoyment. If you do this you will become a sinner and open the road to sorrow and suffering. Whenever pernicious tendencies and evil designs arise in the mind you must try your utmost to avoid them. You must pray to God to protect you. You should always repeat His name and abandoning the place and company in which evil tendencies may be stirred up and stay in such a place and in the midst of such company where even when the mind is inclined, even eager, you will not be able to do any evil deed. you should always try in this way to protect yourself. If, in spite of earnest effort anything undesirable happiness, you will regard it as intended by God.

You should note, however, that everything that happens is willed by God. At the same time it is also true that the Divine Himself has ordained what kind of action will produce what kind of fruits. Good acts lead to happiness, while evil deeds lead to sorrow and suffering. It is with the left hand that one cleanses oneself after defecation; of course, the left hand is a part of this body. Now the hand, not being a separate and independent entity cannot perform this act (of cleansing) by itself; it is you who do this and until you cleanse the left hand through rinsing and rubbing, keep it separate, so that it can it cannot touch your body. Similarly, when one does an evil deed, cleansing and rubbing, so to speak, is necessary for purification; what we call suffering is nothing but this rinsing and rubbing. So, beware! And carefully keep yourself away from sin.

Finding fault in others and judging them adversely (for their faults) – is a grave sin. As soon as you start fault finding and (harshly) criticizing the flaws and vices of other contaminate and

invade you – know this to be an absolute truth. Seeing faults and speaking about them instantly vitiates mind, speech and vision. You yourselves can easily understand this if you notice it even a little. Fault finding immediately taints the mind with the same faults that you notice. That is why it is remarked that the faults of the guilty and the sins of the sinner pass into you while the guilt of the sinner is lightened. The more the sins of the sinner are seen and discussed the more the sinner becomes absolved of his sins.

When kabirji stayed in Varanasi, there was a man who used to vilify him constantly as if this vilification of Kabirji was the one mission of his life; wherever he went he spoke ill of Kabirji. When this man died some people, who were overjoyed, rushed to him to impart this happy news. As soon as Kabirji heard this news he exclaimed: "alas! My washerman has passed away. Who will now cleanse me?" Saying this he started crying loudly. Those who had come to give him the news thought with considerable embarrassment: "what's this? When he calmed down he was questioned humbly as to the cause of his weeping. He replied, "this man was a great friend and well-wisher of mine. He always used to keep me clean and prevented my mind from being defiled. He was my washerman." The questioner confessed that that didn't understand. At this, Kabirji said: whenever somebody's fault is seen and remarked on, the faults and sins of a guilty person instantly pass into the captious detractor. The person (thought to be) guilty, becomes free from sin. The detractor of mine by constantly speaking ill of me protected me from all contamination by sin. Where can I ever find such a great benefactor of mine? He used to do the job of a washerman in relation to one. So his death is a great blow to me?

Don't see the faults of others; don't judge others; for god is the Controller and the Director of all.

Q: How can one escape from restlessness of mind, worries and anxieties.

A: Wherever you go troubles and worries will follow you. Any action or event which causes trouble is sent by God. Thinking in this way if you can thus remain in an unperturbed state of mind, then, wherever you may happen to be, you will be able to conquer this saṃsāra. If you can maintain mental serenity even into the midst of troubles and worries you will attain abiding peace.

In ancient Greece there lived a Mahatma names Socrates. His wife had a violent temper. He used to practice meditation in a garden a little distance away from home; he went home only at meal times. As soon as he came home his wife lashed out at him with stinging words. One day he was a little late in coming home. At this his wife started heaping abuses on him shouting at the top of her voice. As the flood of abuses showed no signs of relenting he started descending down the stairs slowly. Infuriated at this she hurriedly brought a large bowl containing unclean water and poured it on him. At this, he said with a smile: "this downpour after such a long roar of thunder – this is quite welcome."

Try to keep in mind this noble example.

Q: If one is unable to meditate can mantra-japa alone enables him to have vision of God?

A: In order to achieve complete success both japa and dhyāna are necessary. if meditation with the mind is not at all possible for you, don't, on that account give up japa. Nāma-japa without meditation is not, it is true, fully effective; nevertheless, if one practices japa alone God is pleased in this Kali-yuga (the last of the four cosmic periods or Yugas). Only, if one practices japa alone, fulfillment is somewhat delayed.

Each mantra has its own inherent power. If a mantra is uttered with full comprehension of its meaning, the result is better. Even if japa is done without comprehending the meaning of the mantra; this inherent power of the mantra will act. If the mantra is received from one who is spiritually powerful its potency will be greater. The view that the muttering of a mantra without understanding its meaning is ineffective, is one that is not corroborated by the śāstras; in the Vedanta, on the contrary, the opposite view is upheld. It is true however, that mantra-japa performed in a pure and elevated state of mind is more effective. The mantra should be articulated with attention focused on the presiding Deity of the mantra. If one performs japa with the belief that "the mantra is His name", he is awakened. To meditate on the form of a Deity while doing japa is not the general rule. If one is unable to refrain from mentally visualizing a divine image, he can do so. The mantra itself, as a matter of fact, is the real form of the Deity.

The power (efficacy) of mantra does not alter. Its efficacy does not diminish by being transmitted through an uninterrupted (unbroken) succession of Gurus (Guru-paramparā). Mantra is not sound alone, it has form as well. Whether or not you understand the meaning of a mantra, its japa alone will have its effect. If the mantra is genuine it will be sure to have effect. Corresponding to your body there exists some special mantra, which alone will be effective on you. No other mantra will work in you. There are some mantras which all can receive; but all mantras are not so. There are even mantras which if repeated in japa may lead to disaster for a particular sādhaka.

While initiating (giving dīkṣā to) a disciple, the Guru sows the seed of the mantra in him. The disciple will have to nourish the sibling by sprinkling water till it grows into a full-grown fruit-bearing tree. There is no other power in the world as effective, as potent as mantra-śakti. If one practices mantra-japa with faith and devotion, one can perceive the effect. You should practice japa with faith in the sacredness of the nāma (divine name).

Through meditation the mind becomes purified. If one meditates on an object with a single mind one naturally has to give up all other thoughts; otherwise there will be no meditation at all. Laziness and sleep will leave you for meditation; if not, there must be something wrong with the meditation. Sometimes the condition of the body becomes such, it becomes impossible to concentrate one's mind for meditation. At other times, on the other hand, the mind becomes naturally absorbed (in meditation). Meditation, therefore, depends on the state of the body. It is with a view to keeping the body in the right state that rules have been laid down for restrictions regarding food.

Sitting in the right posture (āsana) promotes meditation in a manner which is impossible otherwise. Surrendering yourself in the Divine, try to be absorbed in His japa and dhyāna (meditation); you will have consciousness of the world outside. Whomsoever you may think about deeply, his essential nature will, to some extent, pass into you. This is the reason why the person who meditates attains the nature of the object meditated on.

Q: Is bhajana impossible without strict observance of disciplinary rites and rules of conduct?

A: Observance of rules of conduct and disciplinary rights is of course necessary – for purifying the mind. How can one do bhajana without purification of the mind (citta-śuddhi). Bhajana means the establishment of a loving relation with the Divine. It is not a matter of any special process. As the Gītā says:

"api cet sudurācāro bhajate māmananyabhāk (9.30).....śaśvacchāntiṃ nigacchati (9.31)

- Even if a man of the most vile conduct worships Me .....he attains lasting peace,

Adoration of Him with single minded devotion – that is the main thing. Don't allow these religious rites and rules of conduct to dominate you, you should make these subservient. These rules and rites are intended to turn one's mind and devotion to bhajana. Performing in accordance with the teachings of the śāstras, the mind will be purifying.

Don't attempt to break down traditional and local customs and rights; if you defy them the society will make your life troublesome. Making buddhi (the higher intellect) your guide and applying it on all occasions, do whatever is necessary at the moment. Your relationship with God is only whatever is concerned with bhajana.

Do your bhajana with utmost devotion. You will get everything through what you have received (from the Guru). Nevertheless, you must do bhajana. It is like a little child learning to walk – now rising, now falling and getting itself hurt, and yet cannot stand; but after repeated and persistent attempts it at last succeeds in standing up and running. In like manner start doing bhajana earnestly.

If you are stuck up too much in the observance of rules and rites, it will engender ill will and engulf the mind in tamoguṇa. There was a large tank in the east of our country home. A relative of ours who was a widow, after bathing in the tank was ascending the steps of the ghat (a landing stage on the bank of the pond) with a pitcher filled with water. A man, a muslim, was seen walking along the path in front of her. Seeing him the widow started scolding him roundly, telling him angrily that he had polluted the water she was carrying after a bath. Then she retracted her steps, bathed again and filled the pitcher with pure water: this muslim was entirely innocent and free from guilt and yet how dismally superstitious the religious faith of this widow!

Q: If God is the soul agent of all actions in the universe, why is it that we, everyone of you, regard ourselves egoistically as the doer of our deeds?

A: Yes, it is this "I" that must be destroyed. But it is not easy to do that; the "I" dies hard. What ingrained saṃskāra accumulated through an endless chain of births, is at the back of this aham – this "I". See, how hard and painful it is even to give up a simple habit like that of drinking tea! The sense of "I-ness" too is extremely hard to give up – much more so than ending an addiction.

You must judge and discriminate carefully and repeatedly. The whole creation is controlled by Māyā – the divine Śakti that is moving the Cosmos as if mounted on a machine – "yantrārūḍāṇi māyayā" (the Bhagavadgītā 18.61). I feel that I am independent; if I so wish I can come here; I may not if I don't wish. Some actions are determined by my will; this is what is meant by my being "independent". My action (karma) is willed by me; you feel this; therefore it is true. But proceed to the next stage; every "wish" has a cause; for there cannot be a wish without a cause. That cause is not subject to you. Are you the master of your own wish? Suppose, you wish that you will desist from lust and anger (kāma and krodha); and yet a situation may arise in which your lust or anger is expedited. That incident or situation surely did not occur at your wish. The saṃskāra that is dominant in you will govern you; that saṃskāra is not subject to your will. Every wish has its cause, but that cause is not subject to your will. Your wish is always and everywhere beyond your control.

It is must be admitted however that some actions of yours result from your effort. The saṃskāras are generated by karma. You are performing the actions of this birth through the force of the saṃskāras of your previous incarnations and divine dispensation. Indeed you yourself are doing your karma and yet, in reality you are being impelled to do so. The environment in which you find yourself in this birth is determined by your karmas of previous births. The fruit (outcome) that issues from daiva (divine will) determine the course of action of our present birth.

The sense of "I-am-the-doer" does not go at first. One will have to argue with himself: "the fruit of my action is not in my hands". You should perform all your actions prompted by a sense of

duty. Why should I suffer by worrying about the fruit of my action? I don't know what the fruit of my action will be; He will give me success if it does me good, He will not, if it doesn't. This is the first stage. From this gradually the purification of the mind comes. At a later stage one realizes that it is He Himself who is making me do all karmas – I have myself no karma.

Q: How can the mind be subdued and controlled?

A: It is not easy to subdue the mind. It cannot be done in a short period of time. One should not despair if one finds that the mind is not steadfast and fixed in a short while. Nevertheless, whether the mind becomes fixed or not, you must not be remiss in doing nāma-japa regularly; that alone will cause you great spiritual benefit.

Don't think you are doing anything yourself. Not only that; when others behave with you, treat you in a certain way, don't think it is he who is doing this. You should always cherish the idea that it is God who is making us do whatever we are doing. No one can understand what the Divine wants to do and in what ways.

Just as it is egoism that makes us think "I am the doer" so it is to worry about what others are doing (in relation to us); that too is a kind of egoism, as I have said. It is He who is causing all our actions to be done. You should not harbour malice towards another because he happens to have a nature which is different from yours. This is the only road that leads to peace – there is no other. There is no Being except He; He alone exists. You should always yield yourself to His hands. All spiritual striving, all scriptures is for this and this alone.

Q: How is identification with the body got rid of?

A: Through the power of bhajana, by trying to understand calmly that this body is my real Self, that I am something apart from the body. The body must perish one day but that does not put an end to end to the "ego". Endurance of opposites is necessary; which means – one must try to realize that the affliction due to opposites like heat and cold happens to the body alone, not to the Self (Ātman); I don't suffer from them. All kinds of bondage (to saṃsāra) originate from this identification of the Self with the body (dehātma-buddhi). One's mind is naturally

pleased towards him who displays solicitude for it; he seems to be a near and dear one. When this ātma-buddhi ends, how, in what manner can the saṃsāra bind us to it.

Q: If one remains in the gṛhasthāśrama as a house-holder without taking sannyāsa can he attain God?

A: With regard to God-realization, there is no distinction between a gṛhī (house-holder) and a sannyāsin. However, the sannyāsins attain various super normal powers which house-holders do not. But acquisition of such powers comes in the way of spiritual progress. It is for this reason that many spiritually advanced souls are constantly on their guard (in this regard); they seldom exhibit their yogic powers.

The notion that renouncing the world leads to the attainment of God is not correct. So long as craving for objects of this world persists, nothing will happen. The state of sannyāsa can be embraced only when an urge a genuine urge to renounce the world arises from within; otherwise adoption of sannyāsa forsaking one's wife and children is a grave offence.

Q: We can do nothing so far as sādhana is concerned; instead of thinking about God we are preoccupied all the time with saṃsāra. May we ever hope to be liberated?

A: Green mangoes have an astringent taste at an early stage; later, they gradually turn sour; at a still later stage they become more sour; then sweetness is combined with sourness, gradually; finally, they become wholly sweet without a trace of sourness in it, and gratify the palate with nectar-like delicious taste.

Nothing can be achieved in one day. Gradually the defects and deficiencies will disappear. The entire cosmos, from Brahma to the grass, are deluded by divine Māyā. All are manifesting everywhere in the universe His playful acts passively. Can any jīva ever transgress His divine dispensation? Even over the thoughts and ideas that sometimes appear from time to time has absolutely no control in his mind. The saṃskāras of karmas done in previous births that have caused the present birth - these even liberated souls, who are still in the body have to undergo. This is clearly stated in the śāstras. Hence, thoughts and ideas which are inspired by these saṃskāras cause sorrows and sufferings in spite of oneself. Liberated souls go through this in a

spirit of detachment, whereas bound (baddha) souls are oppressed by them – this is the only difference. But all have to go through them. When all bhoga (experience of pleasure and pain) is exhausted, all bondage is served like the stem of a ripe mango. This is necessary for the completion of the bhoga of karmas in previous births. When time is ripe all impediments are automatically removed. A person imbibes the power of the object that he meditates upon. Devahūti, for instance, by serving her husband, the great sage Ḳardama, with loving devotion, acquired all the yogic accomplishments of the latter; Ajāmila, on the other hand, fell from all his spiritual eminence, power of tapas (penance) through infatuation with a depraved (the wife of a śūdra) with an unclean body. In whatever state God keeps a person, he should remain contented with it.

Q: Why doesn't the mind get absorbed in thoughts of the Divine?

A: Because you enjoy thinking about worldly objects, because you don't have feeling that bhakti towards the Divine is the one supreme object of human life. Unless, one has a feeling of non-attachment towards all objects of enjoyment so long as one is mindful of bodily pleasures and pain one cannot have true "vairāgya" (renunciation). Until one's heart is filled with total renunciation one cannot cross beyond the ocean of saṃsāra. If you have craving for sense-enjoyment, if you are unable to sever all connections from those with whom you have bodily relations – it is futile to take to this path (of spiritual development); if you do so you will not get real penance. You don't really have anything to do with honour or insult. To put an end to all craving for pleasures and non-endurance of bodily afflictions, you may have to suffer chastisements of various kinds. If you can be firmly determined for this purpose, then, and only then, your taking to this road may be fruitful, if you cherish the desire for getting on in this world for attaining fame and celebrity, then it is better for you not to adopt this path of vairāgya.

Q: How is one to meditate on the Paramātman ? For He is devoid of all forms and manifestations.

A: Just as water vapour is invisible and extremely subtle and yet from it many visible forms like clouds and water are manifested – forms which are all manifestations of this invisible vapour; similarly you, I and the entire manifested Cosmos have all emanated from the invisible

Paramātman, one with Him. His essential nature is not visible for it is extremely pure and subtle. Knowing this to be incontestable truth you should regard Him as your essential Self. Though one's Self is imperceptible everybody is aware of its existence. "That Self is one with the Supreme Self (Paramātman), an integral part of Him" – you should try to concentrate your thought on this Truth. For many of us to fix their minds on such an intangible (indiscernible) object during meditation is extremely difficult. Some, therefore, meditate on the infinite Void (ākāśa) in which the Paramātman has manifested Himself, and while thus meditating they feel themselves as one with the Paramātman as the illimitable Void. During such meditation they regard themselves as an inseparable portion of the Supreme Self just as the space within a ghaṭa (an earthen vessel) is a part of infinite space, as the space within an atom too is the part of the same infinite Void. Some others meditate on Him as an infinite, resplendent Being, regarding himself as one with Him (as a part with the Whole). There are other kinds of meditation also. You may however, meditate on any entity with which you find it easy to identify yourself. Just as the invisible Supreme has manifested Himself in forms like the infinite Void just mentioned, so He has manifested Himself in the permanent form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Lord of Vaikunṭha. Thus He looks after (maintains) all jīvas and bestows liberation (mokṣa) to sādhakas. In our own spiritual tradition (sect), it is Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Divine manifesting Himself, who is the object of meditation among most of us; the general practice among us is to regard oneself as the devoted servant (dāsa) of this Śrī Kṛṣṇa as manifest Divine. Our sādhakas mediatate on Him as their Self and Lord.

NEW CHAPTER

Sarvadharmān parityajya māmekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vraja

Ahaṃ tvāṃ sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ

[Bhagavadgītā 18.66]

Abandoning all arguments and discussions regarding dharma and adharma, right and wrong, take refuge in me, I shall release you from all sins; don't grieve.

A certain gentleman who was present wanted to know the meaning of this śloka. At this Santadasji Maharaj said:

Here the Divine Lord used the word "parityajya"; he says, that is to say about "tyāga", not about "sannyāsa". With a view to explaining the difference between "tyāga" and "sannyāsa" He declares earlier in the same Chapter :

Kāmyānāṃ karmaṇāṃ nyāsaṃ

Sannyāsaṃ kavayo viduḥ

Sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṃ

Prāhustyāgaṃ vicakṣaṇāḥ

[Bhagavadgītā 18.2]

The wise understand by "sannyāsa" the giving up of works prompted by desire: the abandonment of the fruits of all actions, the wise declares "tyāga"

What the śloka (18.66) signifies then is this: giving up all desire for the fruit of action and taking refuge in Me go on performing all actions, that is to say, all actions that are prescribed by the śāstras – if you do so you will remain untouched by sin; I shall protect you from all sins; so there will be no cause for grief.

This is the commonly accepted meaning of the śloka, though this interpretation too is very good. In my opinion there is a still better interpretation. Earlier in the text He has already said: "I have explained to you the views held by various schools of thought. After carefully examining these various views – "yathechasi tathā kuru". It means: "now, after closely examining and reflecting on these matters do whatever you think best, if you can, after this, conduct yourself exercising your own judgement – very good; but if you are unable to do so, then, "sarvadharmān

parityajya", that is to say giving up all discussions and arguments about dharma, abandoning all judgements, do what I tell you; without entering into any controversy only carry out My injunctions; if you can do that you will get everything. Arjuna had already said, "bewildered as I am, I cannot understand what is dharma and what is adharma. Having thus answering Arjuna's final question the Divine Lord closes his statement.

From this it becomes also clear that those who are initiated and have obtained refuge in a Sadguru, should, after listening to the words of the Guru, conduct oneself by exercising their judgement and intelligence. And if one is unable to do so, the best thing for him is to surrender himself completely to the Guru; to do whatever the Guru tells one without protest, to carry out whatever he commands in all humility and with firm devotion; that will lead to his total all round fulfillment.

Q: Sādhana according to the Sāṃkhya and the way of Bhakti (bhakti-mārga) – are they the same.?

A: They are the same at the end, though not so at the beginning. The Sāṃkhya way (of sādhana) is all too dry, too arduous.

The way of the bhakta is full of love and delight (pleasant and interesting) from beginning to end. In the Sāṃkhya way of sādhana everything is regarded as non-Self (anātma). The celebrated Upaniṣadic utterance – "nedam yadidamupāsate" (Brahman is not this which all meditate on) is not wholly true. The whole and the ultimate truth is "sarvam khalvidaṃ brahma" (Chandogya Upanisad). At the end this final realization will come. The follower of the path of bhakti (bhakti-mārga), accepting this (as the ultimate truth) from the very beginning one experiences joy by trying to see Him everywhere, always, in all conditions, and in all. The follower of the Sāṃkhya way does not have this (initial) advantage. Besides, he, whom you will reject, will try to exercise his influence on you. This is the general rule. If you deny a deity (neti) he will oppose you. Thus everyone will act against you. But when the bhakta, adopting a positive attitude (iti) sees Him in all objects and creatures and tries to serve Him in this way all become pleased with him in his (spiritual) progress.

The follower of the Sāṃkhya school of philosophy affirms that God is transcendent. The adherent of the path of bhakti does not deny it; he too admits it. He holds that God manifests Himself in the world, and yet transcends it. Brahman (God) in His fullness and totality has four aspects: Brahman as jagat (the world), Brahman as jīva (the individual soul) Brahman as Īśvara (the omniscient omnipotent God) and finally Brahman as akṣara (the immutable Absolute).

This has been clearly stated in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad when it says: "tasmistrayaṃ supratisṭhākṣarañca" – "in Him the three (jagat, jīva and Īśvara) are well-established; and He is also Akṣara". Here the term "trayaṃ" signifies – as the context makes it perfectly clear – jagat, jīva and Īśvara. The famous Puruṣa-sūkta of the Ṛgveda declares: "padosya viśvā bhūtāni / tṛpādasya amṛtaṃ divi" – "the entire universe constitutes only a quarter of Him; while three quarters of Him are in the highest heaven. Hence, to describe Brahman solely as nirguṇa and akṣara (the attribute-less Absolute) is to describe only a part (a quarter = pāda) of Him. This, evidently, is not the whole truth but a partial truth. The whole truth is that Brahman is all-pervading. There is nothing that He is not or is outside Him. In the Upaniṣads this has been stated clearly: "sarvam khalvidam brahma" (All this is Brahman). In the Bhagavadgītā, the Divine Lord, after describing the jīva as a portion of Himself (Brahman) in 15.7 – "mamaivāṃśa jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanatana" – in 10.42 - ....."ekāṃśena sthito jagat" – He has described the world as His (one) part. In ślokas 15.16, 15.17 and 15.18 of the Bhagavadgītā the Divine Lord makes it abundantly clear that His Being is not exhausted by the jagat and the jīvas, that He has also a transcendental existence.

Indeed, all śrutis (Upaniṣads) have revealed this as the ultimate Truth. To describe Brahman solely as Akṣara is therefore, to describe only one aspect of His total Being. This is not therefore, full knowledge. In the Sāṃkhya philosophy, the phenomenal world (jagat) has been described as having a separate existence of its own. So, the followers of the Sāṃkhya School of thought hold that the twenty-four cosmic principles from primordial Nature (Prakṛti) to dead matter (kṣiti) are all other than the Ātman (anātma) and therefore to be rejected. It follows then, that the way of knowledge of the Sāṃkhya is a partial and limited way of attaining liberation. Nevertheless, when they – the followers of the Sāṃkhya way by meditating on Him as the all-transcendent Supreme, are finally established in the Self (Ātman), then this sense of dualism

automatically disappears. In that final stage (of realization) there is no distinction between the realization of the follower of the path of bhakti and that of the Sāṃkhya. When the enlightened soul attains Brahman-knowledge he experiences Brahman as all-pervading; this has been stated in the śrutis. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad states: in the beginning Brahman alone existed. He then knew Himself – 'I am Brahman'. Hence, He became All.

NEW CHAPTER

Somebody is reading Bhāgavata. Towards the end of a Chapter Lord Kṛṣṇa is teaching Uddhava how to meditate. He is telling Uddhava to meditate on the entire body of the Deity at first. Then, when the mind will become one-pointed and absorbed, to contemplate only the countenance of the Divine image. After this, even the Divine countenance is to be left behind and then Uddhava is urged to meditate on Him as the infinite Void (ākāśa). But meditation does not stop here; there are even higher stages of it.

When this part of the text has been read out, Santadasji Maharaj said: Do you know what this means? It means that the mind is to be drawn upwards, elevated from the gross to the subtle, from form to the formless. First, it is the whole body; then, it is the more subtle divine face; and, then, the Void, which is even more subtle. In the Bhagavadgītā the Divine Lord says: "ātmasaṃsthaṃ manaḥ kṛtvā na kiñcidapi cintayet" (6.25) = "after merging the mind in the Self, stop thinking about anything else." Here too the same thing has been said. So, you see now, what the path of bhakti really means. It begins with meditation on the gross (object), but note where it ends. Towards the end (of sādhana) there is absolutely no difference the path of bhakti and the path of knowledge.

Q: Is assuming tilaka and kaṇṭhi (necklace made of small pieces of tulasi wood) obligatory? This often exposes one to ridicule from others.

A: Assuming tilaka and kaṇṭhi is the rule in our community. It is like the practice of wearing professional (official) robes among judges and barristers - the wearing of such robes arouses respect and belief that they are judges and barristers. In a similar manner the assumption of tilaka and kaṇṭhi is extremely necessary for devotees of the Divine. Assuming these things is a constant reminder that they (the bhaktas who assume them) are close to God. This promotes bhajana. The tulasi word in particular, of which a necklace is made and gopī-candana (the clay of Vrindavana) of which the tilaka is made are both potent in themselves. To have them on the body helps to promote the well-being of the mind and body. Not only that: if one assumes them evil spirits cannot act on the body and mind. Thus, kaṇṭhi and tilaka benefits the sādhaka in many ways. It is a special sign of those who affiliate themselves to the holy lineage of ancient ṛṣis.

Men and women in the world are very short-sighted. They have little comprehension of what kind of action leads to what consequences. Ordinary worldly people cannot what the effects of the assumption of objects like tilaka; just as those whose minds tend outwards haven't the faintest notion of the power of mantras which they sneeringly repudiate as nonsense. Similarly externally oriented people are unable to realize the potency of assuming tilaka and observance of salutary rules of conduct. As everybody knows, the assumption of certain things prevents snake-bite. But can anybody explain it? No intellectual person, therefore, should give up the practice of his own religion simply because the effect of a certain action is not perceived by superficial observers. It is wise and good for you not to notice what others think of you. You should try earnestly to remain unsullied and pure in your own heart. God certainly knows what you really are within and He is accordingly ordaining what is good for you. It is not wise to take note of other's praise or blame. If you are sincere and honest to God, others too will regard you as such. To test you and to strengthen you sometimes others may through His will, adopt a hostile attitude towards you; but that will make no difference to you; but don't take any notice of it. If you remain firm the jibes and taunts of others will be ineffectual. When I was a house-holder

I used to assume kaṇṭhi and tilaka but no one on that account ever dared to mock at me. The tilaka impressions are the symbols of the attendants (pārṣadas) of Lord Viṣṇu.

Q: Has prasāda (food offered to God) any special greatness or power?

A: The food offered to God has to be sanctified by repeating one's own mantra (of the Deity). Then, after worshiping the bhoga with the sacred tulasī leaf and remembering your own Deity (iṣṭadeva) one is to pray to Him to accept it. Thus, food offered to God turns into prasāda. When offered to God prasāda is imbued with power. The same applies to the caranāmṛta (water touched by the feet of the Diety). Prasāda increases one's spiritual power and its influence acts on one's life. Babaji Maharaj (my Gurudeva) used to say: "My chilam – a smoking pipe (turned into prasāda) is very potent. Everyday he used to offer me sanctified tobacco in an earthen funnel; it was just common tobacco that was mounted in the funnel. After having a draught of it himself he used to pass it on to me. When I puffed at it, I found it so potent that I could hardly stand it. I had to put it down.

Once Premdas, a sādhu chela of Babaji Maharaj, being deluded by the learned expositions of pundits took it into his head that as all things are Brahman, that strict observance of rules regarding food and so on are meaningless. He started publicly expressing his views in the āśrama. Hearing this, Babaji Maharaj said: "He has gone mad; what's the use of listening to what he says." As soon as the words came out of his mouth Premdas went mad. Unconscious of external surroundings he wandered about aimlessly from place to place and suffered miserably. Seeing him suffer so much Garibdasji (a senior sādhu chela of Babaji Maharaj) approached Babaji Maharaj and said with folded hands: "Baba, Premdas is a mere boy, kindly be gracious to him." As Garibdasji persisted in his entreaty, he said: "There is the prasāda of Thakurji, you can give it to him. Although he does not believe in the power of prasāda, you may show him whether it really has potency." Then Garibdasji forcibly thrust into his mouth some prasadi of Śrī Babaji Mharaj. But the bread, to him, tasted as bitter as poison; so much so, that he couldn't swallow it. Then Babaji Maharaj himself told him : "have another bite at it; see once more how it tastes." Only a little fragment of bread was thrust into his mouth. Now it tasted like nectar to his palate. Then, slowly, he ate the whole bread. After eating it, all his symptoms of lunacy vanished. Recovering his normal state he prostrated before Śrī Babaji Maharaj. Then

Babaji Maharaj said: "well! Wasn't it you who said that all things are equal? Now, have you seen the greatness of prasāda? You see now why vaiṣṇavas offer to Thakurji bhoga consisting of pure clean food strictly observing rules of cleanliness and purity. This prasāda cannot be compared to other food. Its glory is so great that it cannot be described in word."

Q: Karya-Brahman, Hiranyagarbha, Vasudeva – what do these terms signify? Which state of Brahman is capable of being meditated on?

A: The term Karya-Brahman means the Conscious (caitanya-maya) Purusa (Person) who has, as His body the infinitely cast Cosmos. You, for instance, have a body; just as you are the conscious Purusa indwelling this body of yours, so, the Being whose body is constituted by this infinitely vast Cosmos – that Conscious Person is called Hiranyagarbha or Karya-brahman. He is the first manifested state of Brahman who is formless and unmanifest. The preservation and sustenance of this world and the supremely beatific act of bestowing final release from bondage (mokṣa) on Man – these are the functions which He performs by assuming a special divine Form. This is the divine Form Śrī Krsna as the Lord of Golaka. The first manifested Purusa indwelling the infinite Cosmos in Hiranyagarbha, Śrī Krsna as the Lord of Golaka and the all-transcendent, unmanifest Brahman – all these are signified by the term "Vasudeva". In the Bhagavadgita the Divine Lord has said: "bahunam janmanāmante / jñānavan mam prapadyate / vasudevah sarvam iti / sa mahatma sudurlabhahh." (4.19). After the sadhana in the course of many births the person who attains me, knowing that all this Vasudeva – such a great soul is very rare indeed.

Q: which Deity should be worshipped for what purpose?

A: Every Deity has a special function domain assigned to Him. For instance: "arogyam bhaskaradichhet/ dhanamichheddhutasanat;/ jñānanca sankaradichhet/muktimicchet janardanat." In these verses it is Bhagavan Viṣṇu who has been mentioned as the giver of mokṣa in sastras. In the vedic mantra which begins with the words – "tadvisnoh paramam padam sada pasyanti surayah" – this truth has been revealed. It means that even the gods meditate on Viṣṇu for the attainment of mokṣa. Among human beings those who desire mokṣa, should resort to (the feet of) Viṣṇu. It this is done there is no need for one to worship any other

god. Viṣṇu is all-pervading; so, the worship of any god, no matter who, ultimately reaches Him. Statements like "sarvadeva nāmaskaram kesavam prati gachhati,"- the salutation to all gods proceeds towards Viṣṇu. Hnece, one may offer praṇāma (salutation) to all deities as forms of Viṣṇu; there is nothing wrong in it. A person who desires mokṣa should worship Viṣṇu Himself for liberation. However, if one worships other deities (for liberation) that will not go in vain; they too, will urge devotion to Viṣṇu. That even Mahesvara (Siva) Himself recommends Viṣṇu-bhakti has been mentioned in all the sastras. Hence, fulfillment in Gayatri-mantra (sadhana) is not directly conducive to mokṣa. No doubt it is extremely salutary. Gayatri Devi (goddess) too urges Viṣṇu-bhakti but she does it only to one who desires mokṣa, not to others. My revered Gurudeva, at the very first stage attained fulfillment in Gayatri Mantra; then, it was only many years of arduous sadhana that he attained the vision of God and then, finally mokṣa. This consummation has not been achieved before by fulfillment in gayatri sadhana.

Q: How can one fix the mind?

A: if you are convinced that a particular action can do you good, give you pleasure, your mind will naturally be absorbed in it. Your mind, for instance, is engrossed by a game and while reading a novel your mind becomes absorbed in it. In a similar manner if you derive pleasure in bhajana of the Divine your mind is absorbed in it. If, for instance, a man becomes deeply attached to a woman, he can give up all he has for her.

Secondly, this can be done by judging what is real and what is illusory, by distinguishing between the eternal and transitory. Further, one can obtain divine pleasure through abhyasa (repeated and earnest effort). The practice of repeating divine names (nāma-japa) also cleanses the mind of impurities. Every mantra has a potency of its own. After the practice of japa for a long time, the power of mantra manifests itself; but it will require a considerably long time if the mind is not controlled. If you practice nāma to represent the Divine Himself, this alone will lead to God realization.

Thirdly, the effect of satsamga (the company of good souls) is infallible. Through satsamga one obtains the pleasure of God – when this happens the mind becomes absorbed in God.

Q: How should one conduct one's life?

A: if you live quietly you will be able to remain in peace wherever you happen to be. To live quietly means – you won't try to find out the faults and merits of others. Let others do what they like, you won't even hear them. Not to take cognizance of any matter or what is happening or what is not – that too is a kind of sannyāsa. The eyes are shut and the mind closed. "Let what is happening, happen; I am concerned only with You" – one must live in this way.

It is wrong to grieve over what is past. Let bygones be bygones. One should try to be weary and cautious about the future. If you are ill or suffering, go through it calmly.

Q: Sir! We have no power of any kind. Is it possible for us to attain the omnipotent Īśvara?

A: Exert whatever energy you happen to possess. If one has no more power than an ant has and takes it to Him – even that will not go in vain. Apply fully what capacity you happen to have; even that will please Him. There is no cause for despair.

Suppose one has ten million rupees; if he donates a hundred thousand, even that will be a paltry sum. If, on the other hand, one, who has only one rupee, gives it, he gives away everything he has. Give according to your capacity.

My only duty is to do what God demands of me; therein lies my well-being. To perform one's actions prompted by the sense of duty – there is no desire for or attachment to the fruits of one's action.

You will come by real well-being if you follow the instructions of great souls. It is like the action of the soldier. If there is a victory, there is no gain for him, it is the king who gains. The soldier carries out his assigned job; it earns the pleasure of the king - that is his gain. In a similar way, you should go on performing the karma assigned to you by God, prompted by the sense of duty by using whatever capacity God has endowed you with.

Q: How can faith in God becomes settled and how does reliance on Him come?

A: The company of good souls is extremely beneficial, but is hard to come by. Read the śāstras regularly everyday. (After a while) the Śrutis (the Upaniṣads) are the ultimate source there is nothing greater. But, my son, in my own life I have also found whenever I have read anything written by the ṛṣis I have benefited. When I used to read regularly the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata I had to read the accounts of battles. I have derived benefit even by reading those accounts (of battles). Viṣṇupurāṇa is indeed very good. All (these sacred texts) are good. There is one thing however which you should keep in mind. Don't proceed to read these texts with the attitude of a critic – don't try to look for history in them. While reading them, you will notice that the events that are related in one Purāṇa do not tally with the accounts of the same events may not correspond. You should wholly ignore these matters; while reading these texts you should concentrate only on the ideas expressed in them. This (attitude) is precisely what is needed for one's spiritual well-being. The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata are very good. It is true, in the Vālmikī Rāmāyaṇa, there are few spiritual concepts of a high level, but throughout it, from beginning to end, there flows a stream of holiness and purity. When I used to read the Vālmikī Rāmāyaṇa regularly, it seemed to me as though my entire body has become impregnated with Rama.

Q: What purpose is served by chanting hymns to God? Is He pleased by it?

A: God is infinite and completely fulfilled in Himself. He has no want of anything. However, when the reflected object can be adorned only by adorning the object itself, the qualities and attributes which are described in the hymns to God make themselves manifested in the man (who is chanting the hymns), who is the reflection of God. Such hymns thus benefit the sādhaka. To God Himself it is of no consequence. The attributes which are ascribed to Him are manifested in oneself.

Q: I keep reading the Gītā, but where is the fruit of it? I do not feel it.

A: Reading alone is not enough, my son! You must think while you read it. What you read, you should try to ponder till you form a clear conception of it. To read thus, even one or two

śłokas – even that is very helpful. If you don't reflect and make an effort to grasp it in this way, to finish one Chapter from another is of no use. You should read the Gītā regularly everyday. It will be a very good thing if you can do this. At the first stage, the reading of the Gītā will yield hardly any pleasure; for, it contains the very essence of all the quintessential Truths. At first these (Truths) are apt to seem insipid. At this stage, it is very good to read Śrīmad-Bhāgavata, Viṣṇu-Purāṇa and Śānti-Parvan of the Mahābhārata as in these texts the ideas have been illustrated through various tales, the reading of them becomes an interesting affair.

Q: Is dhyāna (meditation) superior to japa?

A: Both dhyāna and japa are necessary. It ensures quicker result. After ablutions and bath and then assuming tilaka you should mentally offer praṇāma to the entire Guru-parampara beginning with Śrī Haṃsa Bhagavān and ending in your Guru. Then you should meditate on the forms of the Guru and the iṣṭa-deva as the Guru has instructed you. The essential principle of dhyāna is that the powers and attributes of the person (or the deity) pass into oneself. Just as reading and hearing about the exploits of heroes arouses in one heroic impulses, so if one meditates on the visible forms of the Guru and the iṣṭa-deva, their attributes and powers flow into oneself. While meditating on the Guru, you should think that he is seeing your outside as well as inside. if you meditate in this way you will realize gradually that there is a link between you and your Guru. If you become absorbed in meditation on either the Guru or the iṣṭa -deva, the mind will begin to be stable and then the feeling of joy will come naturally.

Before meditating on the Divine, you should think: "I am an integral portion as pure consciousness (cit) of Him; I am not separate from Him." When meditating in this manner you will be able to merge yourself totally in the object contemplated you will cease to have any sense of your separate existence; when this happens, the act of meditation, the object meditated on and the meditator himself, all three will be reduced to one – the object contemplated. This is called samādhi.

You should perform nāma-japa with utmost devotion; from this alone you will obtain every kind of well-being. Once your mind becomes absorbed in the nāma (divine name) this nāma alone will pull the mind within. Nāma has its own power. First drawing the mind aside from all external

objects fix it in nāma. You should reflect on the drawbacks of the things towards which the mind is tending and try to engross the mind in the joy that springs from bhajana.

In worship the nature of the person or the Deity is instilled in the worshipper. You should, while muttering the mantra, address your mind to the presiding Deity of the mantra and while practicing japa ponder the meaning of the mantra. The mantra at all events should be articulated clearly and correctly. The meaning of the mantra as a whole is self-surrender to Divine, to be united with Him. If one keeps this feeling of self-surrender at heart while doing japa – with this thinking about the meaning of the mantra is also done; when this is done, there is no need to reflect on each word of the mantra separately. The words are potent in themselves; with the prolonged practice, reflection on the significance of the mantra, it keeps flowing un-interruptedly at the time of japa. The effect becomes more marked and the japa goes on more rapidly. Until the significance of the mantra becomes fully grasped through meditation, only japa (of the mantra) must be performed; even that has considerable effect.

To articulate the mantra mentally (silently) is the best (kind of japa); nevertheless, muttering the mantra through the movements of the lips too, is fruitful. The practice of japa accompanied by reflection on the significance of the mantra is the best way; but the śāstras do not say that if this is not done the japa will go in vain. However, doing japa with utterance of the mantra alone too bears fruit. But it is necessary to pay particular attention as to whether it is accompanied by reflection on the meaning of the mantra. The need for reflection on the meaning of each separate word is fully served by pondering the main, overall import of the mantra. Along with the articulation of the mantra, the stream of thought (about the import of the mantra) flows continuously. Hence, thinking about the meaning of the mantra, which runs simultaneously with the japa does not require more time than the muttering of the mantra alone.

Q: I sit down regularly to practice japa and dhyāna, but nothing results. Without my being aware of it all sorts of thoughts come rushing into the mind. How is it possible to fix the mind in japa and dhyāna?

A: The mind is not stilled easily; as soon as one begins japa, thoughts of all kinds rush in; this is natural; but don't worry on this account. This happens to most of us. Try to bring the mind

under control by intense effort. if you practice incessantly for a long time the mind will certainly be brought under control. Never cease to practice nāma-japa in continuous succession. Through the influence of nāma, the mind will begin to be fixed. It is not easy for anyone to fix the mind, to make the mind still. So, if one is unable to so, there is no reason for despair. If the mind becomes still even after twenty years of strenuous effort you shouldn't consider it a long time.

Try to keep your mind cheerful and serene in all circumstances. Whether your mind becomes still or not you should practice japa regularly everyday. While repeating nāma mentally no sound, it is true is audible from outside; yet, it is possible to perceive mental sound as a result of the inner ear, combining with the mind can be understood with a little effort. This is what is known as the meditation on sound alone. As the mind begins to be absorbed in the contemplation of sound it will begin to be stilled.

Q: Which seated posture (āsana) is best fitted for japa and dhyāna? After keeping the spine erect during āsana for a while I feel (a sensation of) pain.

A: You can practice nāma-japa sitting in a posture in which you can do it easily and feel no pain in the body; there is nothing wrong in it. You should habituate yourself, nevertheless, to sit in one particular āsana, no matter which. After long and regular practice that āsana ceases, afterwards, to be painful.

Early in the morning and in the evening after taking a bath and thus purifying oneself, putting on clean clothes and then sitting on an āsana made of wooden stuff - this is how one should perform japa and dhyāna. Whenever you find it convenient to sit still in a particular posture for the practice of bhajana – do so. In the morning however, try before you begin your activities, to practice nāma-japa at best for five minutes. You should make it a regular practice to do japa on the rosary, keeping count of it. With the habit of regular practice of japa, it will go on of itself. After performing japa on rosary for some days, the rosary itself is impregnated with power. When this happens, nāma-japa can go on un-interruptedly without hindrance.

Wherever you go, you should take the rosary (mālā) with you. Only during the (four or five days) of menstruation you should do japa without the rosary, mentally. Do Japa with the rosary at the

specified hours keeping regular kinds. At other times too, you should do japa whenever you can, with constant remembrance of God. You should do it at all times; there is no wrong time or right time in this. Apart from regular hours of bhajana sitting in āsana you should always try to feel that your iṣṭadeva is always with you, remaining in your heart and do your bhajana with love and devotion.

Q: Why isn't the mind absorbed in nāma-japa?

A: Why is the mind engross itself in saṃsāra? Because your mind finds pleasure in saṃsāra. In a like manner, when in your mind you will feel genuine pleasure in God, it (the mind) will be automatically drawn to nāma-japa. The main thing is non-attachment (vairāgya) and control over the senses. The desire for the pleasure derived from the enjoyment of saṃsāra, and the hankering after pleasure of the senses, forcibly bind the mind to saṃsāra; they prevent the mind from turning to God, do not allow the mind to develop love for the Divine.

When any thought other than that centered on the Divine will feel like poison, there will be burning anguish in the heart - then in that mind real bhajana – will be possible. Doing bhajana mechanically is not enough – it must strike the right chord. Absorption in the divine nāma that is true bhajana. You should practice japa with unflinching devotion sitting on your own āsana in the morning and evening or whenever you are free and also in the small hours in the morning; you can also do it when taking a stroll after dusk. During these times you will practice japa thinking all the while that your guru is seated above the head; practice nāma-japa for as long a period as you can. By this alone the harmful effects of evil company will be removed, and you will get peace within.

You must try in whatever state, whatever place god keeps you, to remain contented. If you can practice japa all the time and in all conditions, you will be able to attain peace even in the midst of all this. With the continuous practice of nāma-japa you will certainly come to find pleasure in it. Nevertheless, even if you do not find pleasure in it don't give it up; if you can thus stick to it you will come to find pleasure in it.

Even the ability for doing bhajana is dependent on the grace of the Guru. One's own sincere and earnest effort is absolutely necessary. But beware! There must not be the slightest trace of ahaṃ behind your effort. "I shall achieve success through my own effort" – such a notion is entirely wrong.

"O Lord! Lead me along the way, holding my hand; I have no capacity of any kind" – if you can invoke Him thus piteously seeking refuge in Him in utmost humility – if you can do this His grace will descend. If and when effort is combined with grace bhajana becomes fruitful.

Q: Is it proper to do japa while one is ill and in an unclean state, lying? Is it permissible then to perform japa on the rosary?

A: It may so happen then that while lying in bed you will have to relieve yourself; even then you will not become unclear. In that state of illness, lying in bed you can remember His name and do japa – there is nothing wrong; do not then think yourself unclear or defiled.

Generally, before dying one suffers from illness. Will he not then cease to chant His name because he defecates and urinates on the bed?

Q: Is it improper to do japa while one is walking? Is it permissible then to japa on the mālā?

A: Why? If required you can do japa on the mālā (rosary) while walking about. Suppose you are feeling drowsy or overpowered by sloth – what's the harm then in doing japa while walking?

Q: Is it right to perform japa rapidly increasing thus the number of japas or should one do it listening to the nāma as it is clearly articulated?

A: Perform japa in such a way that each nāma articulated slowly and distinctly, can be clearly heard. It is not a matter of doing it rapidly, thus increasing the number of japa.

Q: Can there be japa during sleep?

A: If you keep doing japa before sleep at night, you will see that when you wake up, japa is still going on.

Q: After receiving dīkṣā most people who are initiated do not seem to have any beneficial effect?

A: The minds of most people are bound up in saṃsāra and the physical body; how can there be any fruitful result? If good seeds fall on arid land it takes a long time for the seed to germinate; but when the seeds fall on tilted soil the result is soon perceptible. The ṛṣis of old had made thousands of disciples; have you heard the names of all of them? May be one of them or two or four might have gone up (in their spiritual development); nevertheless, even those who are left behind have nothing to fear. Remember the song Goswami Prabhu used to sing – "My brother, hold on to Hari/ so that you are transformed into Him – His essence/.....Giving up all hypocrisy and wile offer bhakti to Hari and all His creatures / it is through sevā (service), chanting hymns to Him and meek submission that enables one to attain Rāma easily."

Q: When you remain in Śrī Vrindavan we can have our questions and doubts answered and resolved by writing to you. But how would it be possible when the Guru is no more in the body?

A: Even after passing away of the Guru your link with the Guru will persist. Babaji Maharaj (my Gurudeva) had appeared before me and spoken to me (when he was no more in the body). You too are in link with him; he has indeed received you. Proceed along the road, remembering him. You will be blessed. You see my son! If there be an earnest prayer within, it is instantly known. If in the absence of letters nothing reaches your Guru, where then does all this lead to? After all, how much in reality, that you wish to convey is contained in your letter?

Q: Is there any way of attaining God quickly?

A: It is impossible to attain Him without His grace.

Nayamātmā pravacanena labhya,
Na medhayā, na vahuna śrutena,
Yame vaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ.

"This Ātman is not attainable by listening to lectures. It is attainable neither by intelligence nor by vast learning. Only he whom He receives through His grace can attain Him." It is only the sādhaka that is whom He graciously receives, attains Him. Those who are in a hurry to attain God – their fulfillment in bhajana is most delayed. Even Śruti declares: He is not to be attained by one who is in a hurry (to dō so) – "na tvaramānena labhyaḥ". In the Sanatsujata Section of the Udyoga Parvan (Mahābhārata) the same thing has been said by Bhagavān Sanatkumāra. The reason for this delay is absence of belief in the dispensation of God.

Knowing that it is God Himself who has in reality, ordained what is to happen and when you should await the appointed time with relaxed mind calmly. For one who has learned to adopt this attitude the final fulfillment is comparatively nearer indeed. "By accepting me as a disciple the Guru has made me a servant of God; in due time He will remove all obstacles, and thus I shall attain the blessed state of abiding peace – "for him in whose heart this belief has been firmly entrenched, the attainment of the blessed state of serenity has come closer. For him, on the other hand, who has become impatient, who is in a breathless hurry to attain siddhi (success) – for such a person siddhi is evidently far away.

This is not real love for the Divine. Before love is generated, there must be some realization, however little; it is then and then only that love arises. Without some experience there cannot be a feeling of attraction or love. And unless the mind becomes calm there cannot be any real experience. The mind of those who hasten has evidently not become tranquil. When the belief that it is God who governs all our actions becomes firmly established this state of restless impatience disappears. Remaining in a state of calm confidence, they await the advent of the (divinely) appointed time. This is evidently not a state of restless hurry.

Q: The disciple should serve the Guru everyday. But I live far away. How can I then serve the Guru everyday? Further, how Guru-sevā is possible when the Guru will be no more in the physical body?

A: The Guru is not confined to a particular body; he is one with God. He is no other than that all-pervading Being – the Ātman, and is able to shower his Grace from every place. Hence, even if, one is away from the embodied Guru or even when he is no more in the physical body, if one maintains an attitude of service to all creature as forms of the Guru or the Divine, Guru-sevā is done by that alone.

The service of all creatures as the Divine incarnate is real Guru-sevā – service to Guru. The body assuming which the Guru has instructed you – that body is never permanent; if you regard that body alone as the Guru, you should understand that Guru-tattva, the truth about the Guru, has not been revealed (to you).

Q: If one, without using the mālā or the fingers performs japa, sitting still on the āsana – would there be anything wrong?

A: No, there is nothing wrong in it. But owing to the restlessness of the mind japa is seldom continuous and un-interrupted; gaps intervene from time to time. If one performs japa on the mālā this does not happen. This is one of the reasons why the use of mālā during japa has been prescribed. Through the regular use of mālā during japa the mālā itself becomes charged with energy. The tulasi wood is itself full of pure spiritual force; hence, seeking its assistance during japa is particularly beneficial.

Q: What is the use of assuming tulasi kaṇṭhi (a necklace made of pieces of tulasi wood)?

A: It is the emblem of the of the attendants of Lord Viṣṇu. When one assumes it the gods and the ṛṣis recognize him as one who belongs to Lord Viṣṇu, and the envoys of Yama cannot touch him. Moreover, by purifying the body it renders one fit to serve and worship Viṣṇu.

Q: My income having been reduced I cannot donate as much as I wish. Is it right to donate beyond one's means.

A: If God gives you enough money, you will give as much as you wish; if He does not, don't. To feel regret for this is not wise.

It has been stated in the Mahābhārata that when Yudhiṣṭhira went to the forest many brāhmaṇas, leaving behind their homes, wives and children, followed him. One day, knowing that it was beyond his means to reduce the want of clothes of some among the brāhmaṇas, was thinking with a heavy heart – what shall be I do? At this time, the great sage Dhaumya coming to know of Yudhiṣṭhira's dejection, said to him, "Money is like dirt. When the hand becomes stained with dirt it has to be thoroughly cleansed; otherwise it pollutes the whole body. In a similar manner the acquisition of money taints the mind. People believing that money is the provider of food and clothes tend to forget that it is God who is the real Giver of one's sustenance. Possession of money makes one proud and contemptuous towards the poor; later, money enslaves him to such an extent that he goes to increase his income even by afflicting himself with hardships. This taint of the mind can be washed away only by spending it for a good purpose. But just as it is wiser and better not to let the hands be tainted, instead of feeling sad because one is unable to donate for lack of enough money, one should regard it as a kind of divine Grace. Nevertheless, without renouncing the wish to serve and do good to others you should offer services of other kinds to them.

Q: Is it possible to renounce a malicious attitude to evil-doers?

A: Both merits and drawbacks are present in everybody – more or less; unless one ignores them it is impossible to establish pleasant relations with anybody. You yourself, for instance, have many faults which you do not perceive. Just as it is not desirable that others to harbour malice towards you on this account, so, for you too, it is not right to feel ill-will towards others when you notice their faults. Know it for certain that this malicious attitude keeps your mind defiled. You must therefore try by ridding your mind of this (malice) with the utmost effort, try to establish cordial relations with all. This, you must remember, is real vaiṣṇava dharma.

Hence, whenever a feeling of malice towards any person arises in your mind, you should take alarm and mentally praying for forgiveness from Him, try to keep your mind always unsullied and favourably disposed towards all. This, you should keep in mind, is the chief dharma of the

vaiṣṇavas. If one can remain kindly disposed towards all irrespective of friend or foe, Divine Grace flows towards him very soon and dispels all his sufferings and sorrows. This you should know is absolutely true.

Q: How should one do karma? Is saṃsāra an obstacle to sādhanā?

A: Our way is this: try to feel the Divine presence in all. All forms of all jīvas are His form; as long as the sense of dualism persists you should meditate on the Divine as incarnate in all visible forms (of creatures) and conduct yourself as a humble servant of all. This is the only consideration; this is the only thing that should determine the nature of your own action.

Father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife and children – you should serve them all as manifested forms of the Divine. Don't regard any of them as belonging to you or regard any object as your possession. All belong to Him, you are only His servant – if you strive to keep up this attitude of mind, things like vairāgya (non-attachment) and vicāra (judgement and discrimination) which are required in other sādhanas – all these are performed by this alone; moreover, its spiritual outcome is greater than any other form of sādhana.

That one should, after marrying, take to the stage of the house-holder has been ordained by God Himself through the śāstras. In order to carry out His injunctions, to proliferate His saṃsāra that one should produce one's progeny, not for the sake of one's own enjoyment. He in whose mind such an attitude is developed is really a sannyāsin even though he remains in saṃsāra; saṃsāra cannot involve him. On the other hand, a person in whom such an attitude has not been generated is not, even he had adopted sannyāsa, a true sannyāsin.

Q: Who is Śrī Kṛṣṇa?

A: The word Śrī Kṛṣṇa is used in three senses: (1) Śrī Kṛṣṇa as avatāra (born to Devakī) (2) Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Lord of Golaka (He exists eternally) (3) Śrī Kṛṣṇa as Parabrahman. The avatāra and the avatārin (the Divine Being who has incarnated) are one. The Lord of Golaka incarnates Himself (literally "descends" as Śrī Kṛṣṇa) assuming His full powers. Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā exist together and simultaneously.

Q: Is everybody entitled to worship Viṣṇu in the Śālagrama? (a sacred spherical stone of special kind)

A: The rule about Śālagrama–puja is that non-vaiṣṇavas, women and śūdras should not touch it. Women and śūdras who are vaiṣṇavas can touch it; there are proofs of this in the śāstras. In Dwārakā, for instance, everybody is touching the Deity, bathing it – there is no restriction. There are various inherent qualities in Śālagrama; touch mars these qualities. Śālagrama is born impregnated with power; touch may alter or diminish this power.

Q: Does the performance of śrāddha and tarpaṇa cause pleasure to one's ancestors? Do the latter actually receive the offerings of edible substances? But how is that possible?

A: Yes, it is possible. The ṛṣis have told us that the gods exist. They (these special gods) convey the offerings to the departed souls wherever they may happen to be and in whatever form or species. It is not that they will convey precisely those articles of food. However, the day on which these edibles are offered an equivalent of the latter must, through them reach to the respective forefathers.

Suppose, the person for whose sake you have performed the śrāddha – may be, he has been born as a cow in this birth. As a consequence, on the day on which you have performed the śrāddha he will get some good food; or he will surely feel for some other reason a deeper satisfaction and joy. This satisfaction and joy occurs with the rise of sattva-guṇa. This – the rise of sattva-guṇa - makes for their ascent to higher worlds. As for him who performs śrāddha or tarpaṇa – he is certainly benefited.

Q: Why is a man struck with fear at the time of death?

A: Take, for instance, the case of water: there are some who can swim when they get into water; there are some others who do not know how to swim. But the man who doesn't know swimming is afraid to get into water; and even he who doesn't want to plunge into water. Similarly, the jīva who is on the brink of death, does not know where he will be after leaving this body, where he will go; this is why he is afraid to leave this body.

This dread of death which every man experiences is eternal. This saṃskāra – the fear of death – is innate in man – it is there as soon as he is born. The ultimate cause of all man's fear is the fear of death.

Q: Can a man know when his death is imminent? Why does a man feel restless at the time of death?

A: Yes, he can know the functions of this body are all governed by vāyu (vital breath). This vital breath (Prāṇa) pervades and permeates the whole body. When the moment of death comes this vāyu (Prāṇa) gradually leaves the body, beginning from bottom of the foot. The parts of the body which the Prāṇa leaves becomes benumbed. As soon as the vital breath starts rising upwards the jīva will know that it (vāyu or Prāṇa) is urging him to leave the body. The jīva is exceedingly reluctant to leave this body; he tries desperately to cling to it; even after suffering a thousand afflictions he tries frantically to remain in this body; he will, on no account, go, leave this body. This intense effort makes him restless. In happiness as well as in misery, the jīva having had a dwelling place in the body is living within it, feeling secured; as to where, to which place he will go after leaving this body he hasn't got the faintest notion. It is for this reason that even after suffering endless afflictions, the jīva does not want to leave this body on any account. You see – you are in this house of yours; suppose, somebody asks you to leave this house or drives you out – will you forthwith get out of this room and leave the house? No, you will not go out; on the contrary, you will make every effort to stay (in the house). The same is the case, you should know, with leaving the body.

Q: In the case of those who know that they will go to happier worlds – do they feel the same kind of infatuation regarding the body?

A: Not at all! They know that this body is nothing. They leave this body with pleasure. Gods from above come down to take them away. They depart from this world with a feeling of joy. Nevertheless, owing to the saṃskāra implanted by countless incarnations they feel some fear and manifest some other natural bodily characteristics. But this

infatuation of theirs lasts only for a moment; for keeping in mind the realm of bliss (where they are about to go) they become free from all delusions and filled with joy.

Q: Why don't the great souls appear before us? What sort of activities are they engaged in?

A: The great souls inspire us from within. They assist you in your bhajana. For instance, you suddenly feel inspired during bhajana; you may not understand the reason for this. The great souls encourage and inspire us in this way. Don't think that is because they do not go about lecturing, they are not inactive.

Q: Is nāma-saṃkīrtana (choral chanting of divine name) forbidden in our seat?

A: There is no bar to the chanting of divine names. The name of the Divine is itself the root of all that is good and blessed. There is no question here of any harmful effect. However, I am not aware of there being any śāstric injunction regarding kīrtana. First, there is the chanting of divine names or the reciting or singing of His various līlās; then the bhoga is offered to the Deity with the best quality of food one can afford and, afterwards, the bhaktas receive prasāda. This is the usual procedure. When divine names are chanted with love and devotion He comes close to the place. Know it for certain that all the other gods are also present there. His pleasure means pleasure of all gods. The assembling of a number of persons and then chanting together divine names is not forbidden in our community (sampradāya). This, however, is outward sādhanā. When one feels dryness, such kīrtana does one some good. But it has a greater beneficial effect when the assemblage consists of brother disciples belonging to the same sampradāya; for, the same Guruśakti is infused in all. When kīrtana is performed together with outsiders, it is the outsiders who benefit more while your śakti, in most places, is diminished.

However, performance of nāma-japa at regular hours while seated on the asana is more beneficial. It is not right to join such (congregational) kīrtana in place of nāma-japa. You may however, join such samkīrtana at other times when you are not doing

japa. Besides, one should perform the worship of the Deity (at home) regularly and with devotion. If, with the installation of the Deity regular service and worship is introduced, a lapse in this regard is an offence (to the Deity).

Q: When indisposed, I cannot practice bhajana keeping special hours. Is it an offence?

A: Practice bhajana as much as your body can endure; that will be enough. To practice bhajana afflicting the body is bhajana of the tāmasika kind. If you feel tired in the evening, perform japa lying in the bed. You must, however, do as much as is within your capacity. God will be pleased if you do your utmost. What is possible when you are fit is not possible when you are ill. There is no reason to feel regret for this.

The body is the chief instrument of bhajana of all religious practices; the kind of sādhana that increases your illness should not be resorted to. The Divine Lord has said in the Gita – "only he who is restrained in eating, in his bodily movements, in his activities and endeavours .....who neither eats too much nor goes without food....is fit to practice Yoga" (Gita 6.17). You should act constantly keeping in mind those ślokas.

Q: Does eating bel leaves or those of neem help to curb lust?

A: Don't use bel or neem leaves, or for that matter, any other thing in order to end lust. Through the grace of God all these things will subside gradually; don't trouble yourself on that account. You will realize the cause for this in due course.

You should practice nāma-japa regularly, keeping count (of the number of japas). You must try to concentrate your mind as much as you can. The mind does not easily become one-pointed. Nevertheless, even if the mind does not become one-pointed or become drawn to other thoughts, don't cease to do nāma-japa. Through it alone you will gradually reap spiritual well-being. However, if sexual urge becomes too strong you will repeat this mantra from time to time "oṃ klīṃ kāmadevāya vidmahe/puṣpavāṇāya dhīmahi / tanno'nangaḥ pracodayāt."

Q: If one attains siddhi in Gāyatrī-mantra-japa then what is the use of practicing japa with the Guru-mantra? Isn't siddhi in Gāyatrī-mantra conducive to mokṣa?

A: This mantra is more comprehensive and powerful than Gāyatrī mantra. While doing Gāyatrī japa you meditate on the presiding deity of Sūrya-maṇḍala (the Sun); whereas through this mantra you will meditate on the Divine persuasively. I don't forbid anyone to practice Gāyatrī-Mantra. This japa will take you as far as the power of this mantra extends. There is also meditation that will take you beyond that. The meditation on the Gāyatrī-mantra will take you as far as the Sūrya-maṇḍala – that is, sphere of the Sun. but this attainment is not final.

Even siddhi (attainment) in Gāyatrī-mantra is not directly conducive to mokṣa (liberation). No doubt, it is extremely salutary. The Goddess Gāyatrī herself, on her part, urges Viṣṇu-bhakti. She does this, of course, only to those who aspire after mokṣa. My revered Gurudeva first attained siddhi in Gāyatrī-mantra; then, only after a long and arduous sādhana he had realized God and finally attained liberation. Evidently, this had not been achieved by his previous siddhi in Gāyatrī-mantra.

The results of all forms of upāsanā (worship and meditation) are not the same. You will imbibe only as much śakti (power) as the deity worshipped and meditated on possesses – no more. The ṛṣis tell us that this visible world is all Brahman, nothing else (sarvam khalvidam brahma); upāsanā should be done always keeping this in mind. While doing nāma-japa, the nāma (the divine name) should be regarded as Brahman Himself. If one worships deities like Śiva, Durga, Ganeśa and Sūrya, they will convey them to Vaikuṇṭha. No other deities are able to take their worshippers to Vaikuṇṭha. If, for instance, you take hold of the leaves you grasp the tree itself; again, when you take hold of the boughs you also grasp the tree itself; but, unless, you can take hold of the main stem you will not be able to reach the roots. If you grasp the leaves they will take you up to the branches.

You should not look down upon any sampradāya (religious community).

Q: With the annihilation of the physical body, the mind are the mind and the higher intelligence too wiped out?

A: With the annihilation of the physical body, the mind (manas) and the higher intelligence (buddhi) are not obliterated.

Q: What is the meaning of ajagara-vṛtti (the habit of a python) adopted by sādhus ?

A: ajagara-vṛtti means "remaining inert", without exerting oneself. "I am lying like an ajagara; I won't rise or do anything by myself; you come and feed me. Babaji Maharaj (My Gurudeva) used to say, he also had gone through this process of sadhana. However, this sādhana entails (causing unnecessary trouble for God). He has given you hands and feet; why don't you then do things for yourself (without bothering God?)

Q: Why does God make wicked people do evil deeds? Why does He make the thief steal?

A: Now, suppose you are holding something in your right hand; if your left hand takes it away, do you think something wrong has been done? Say, God is making somebody collect something while He is making another get hold of it; in your eyes that is theft, pure and simple; to Him, however, it is not so. Every jīva is an integral part of Him. If something held by one limb of the body is taken away by another limb (of the same body) then He does not regard it as theft.

Q: We often hear about "free will". What does it mean?

A: You see, my son – nothing ever happens, is happening now or will happen in future against His will. Whatever has happened, is happening now or will happen – all these have been pre-determined by Him. It is at His will that everything has happened, is happening now and will happen in future – this is the essence of the matter. Knowing this, surrendering oneself to Him is the highest goal of Man; self-surrender to Him is the ultimate justification – the summum bonum of human existence. The chief obstacle to this is – ahaṃkāra (self-sense). The saṃskāras that have accumulated through millions of birth are not easy to get rid of. Hence, one must strive persistently. As a result of this (unremitting effort) ahaṃkāra will be destroyed.

"Freedom of Will" is "meaningless nonsense"; "will" is never "free". It is true that some acts are under your control. But what you call "my will" is not "free"; it is governed by some other "cause". "Will is caused by something external".

What is really meant by (what you call) "freedom of will" is that some actions are subject to my will. External "influence" together with your "education" and bodily "system" generates your will.

Q: If this be so, how can there be any such thing such thing as one's own effort? Besides, what's the use of making any effort, when everything is pre-determined by Him?

A: When every action is pre-determined then the effort you will make to do something – that too has already been determined by His will. It is through His will that you will make an effort, you cannot help doing so. Your act of effort is not outside His will. If you are not inclined to make an effort it will imply that He has no wish now to make you do so (to make an effort). When it will be His will you will have to do it.

Q: Is that which we perceive through our senses real or illusory, an appearance only?

A: Take for instance, ice. It is a transformation of water. Water is capable of assuming the form of ice. If the ice becomes a knower, a percipient, will he regard water as something different? Indeed, he will realize that he is nothing but water, in another form.

Every jīva is seeking two things: (1) Ānanda (delight) (2) Jñāna (Knowledge). Whatever a person does or refrains from doing is in order to get ānanda. But he doesn't feel much ānanda in what it does in this world of phenomena (saṃsāra). This ānanda, in its very nature transient. He is perpetually running after ānanda that is ever-lasting. The ānanda that endures through day and night for which he is craving all the time – something of that ānanda, however little, is to be found in all the pleasures and enjoyments of this world.

Their (Western) science started to investigate phenomena from the outside. How many things are there is in this body – just imagine! Europe (western men of science) has not yet been able to comprehend fully the workings of this "system" which comprises our body. Take for instance, this mechanism of breathing. Sometimes we breathe through the left nostril, sometimes through the right – and sometimes through both. But there has not been any investigation regarding this matter in Europe and yet it is this which constitutes our vital energy. Surprisingly, there has been no attempt in the West as yet to explore this matter. In our country, this matter like some others has been thoroughly investigated and discussed: when and how, for instance, the breath will blow.

Everything is "fleeting", in a flow; it is changing every moment. Is there anything here that is permanent? What is it like? All human knowledge is acquired through the five senses; and yet this perceptual knowledge is changing every moment. Apart from what we perceive through our senses, namely, sound, touch, form, taste, smell – every object has a 'being'- the western men of science have not yet paid attention to this phenomenon. There are innumerable jīvas (living organisms) within your body. Regarded from your point of view of these jīvas (within your body) they are all separate.

Q: Why are there such differences between one religion and the other?

A: The word Kali means quarrel, conflict. There is conflict everywhere. This is the nature of Kali-yuga (the last of the four great epochs). The dominant tendency of this age is to disrupt unity. All involve the name of God but they are busy in reality with propaganda of themselves. The division into four varṇas and āśramas was introduced in ancient India with such a lofty ideal but nowadays it has become a source of conflict. During meal time it is enjoined that brāhmaṇas and those belonging to lower castes will be seated in separate rows. It is not our intention to disrupt society. When the Divine Providence will break it down, the society will disintegrate naturally. Until this happens, we have no right to rend it asunder. But it is different in the holy place of Lord Jagannatha; but, then, there are special śāstric injunctions and local customs, regarding the matter.

Q: How will our aversion to religion be dispelled?

A: It is true that one's faith becomes stronger if one has direct proof of the truths of Religion. Nevertheless, for a real seeker of Truth, there is no dearth of evidence. And always remember one thing: to disbelieve the utterances (statements) of those who are truthful and have taken to the path of religion, is not an act worthy of an intellectual person. Most of the activities of our lives have to be performed by believing the words of the others. Direct knowledge can be obtained about very few matters. It is by implicitly relying on such beliefs and acting upon them that human beings get their desired results in this world. Patients suffering from diseases for instance are cured because they believe in what the doctor tell them. There are many such examples in our lives. In the realm of the spirit it is the same rule. But in spiritual matters the perception of tangible results is not so easy, for those are not perceptible by the senses. Remember these words of mine; if you can do so your defiant attitude towards religion will gradually diminish.

Q: Why does the practice of prāṇāyāma cause seminal discharge?

A: When one practices prāṇāyāma (the vital breath) rises upwards; this makes the body very hot and it is which difficult to endure for many. It can be endured only by those who maintain strict brahmacarya with full retention of the semen; otherwise, some suffer from excessive discharge of semen, some develop pthysis, some others have diseases of the heart, yet others go mad. This vīrya (semen) is the most vital, the essential constituent of the body. One should try constantly to preserve it. It applies to both sexes (male and female). An even finer essence is ojas – the subtlest of all; if this ojas is dissipated it is extremely difficult to fix the mind; and it is dissipated all too easily, for it is made up of an ethereal substance. As soon as the mind becomes restless this ojas is dissipated. This is the reason why you should guard the mind against restlessness just as you should protect the body (from restlessness).

Q: Restlessness of the body and restlessness of the mind – they are not the same, isn't it?

A: No, but when the mind becomes restless, so does the body.

Q: Coming of evil thoughts - is that what is meant by restlessness of the mind?

A: Yes, you must always try to guard against evil thoughts. As soon as evil thoughts come ojas is dissipated.

Q: The mind is never void of thoughts. So what kind of thoughts prevent ojas from being dissipated?

A: Will you be able to think in the way I shall ask you to do? Is the mind under your control? It will be drawn in so many directions.

Try to perform nāma-japa mentally – always, all the time, even while you are talking. The mind will not become still right away; it will do so after sometime with long and persistent practice.

Q: When in mundane as well as spiritual matters we cannot decide what should and should not be done, does the remembrance of the Guru show us the right way?

A: Inspiration comes from within. Yes, you can remember the Guru. Kṛpā (Grace) will come only if your course of karma so determines it – otherwise not. Even the descent of Grace is subject to Divine Will, it is not something distinct, something outside His Law. All things in the universe are bound by His Law.

Q: How are the kāma and krodha brought under control?

A: Don't pay much attention to them. Practice nāma-japa with earnest devotion; you will get anything through that alone. Full control does not come about soon.

Q: Is it right to accept gifts from everybody?

A: No one is low in my eyes. I, for me, have accepted donations from everybody. As for myself, I have accepted donations from Muslims. If somebody belonging to the lower castes offers with love, rice, daal etc, a sādhu can take them and after cooking eat them too. When you accept the gift from somebody you are accepting his sins also. If you are intensely devoted to bhajana you will be able to nullify the effect of the sins associated with the gift. If you accept gift from anybody you should do so after assessing him thoroughly. You have become a sādhu, the word "dāsa" is suffixed to your name. you

are a "dāsa" (servant) of God. If you accept something from somebody you should do so for the service of God, regarding yourself as His dāsa. If you can cherish this feeling you will not be guilty of any lapse. Only, you should beware against ahaṃ – self-sense.

Q: How to remain in saṃsāra?

A: Always remain contented and kindly disposed towards all and practice bhajana – in the morning and in the evening – and serve every member of the family. Never remain discontented. In whatever condition Thakurji (God) keeps you it is certainly for your well-being – don't forget.

Somebody asked Goswamiji (Śrī Śrī BijoyKṛṣṇa Goswami): "How are you?" He replied – like a leaf left over after a meal – fleeting here and there driven by a gust of wind. The storm sometimes is driving them upwards, placing the, may be, on the heads of people who happen to be on the roof; sometimes, again, dropping them into the drains: take the case of Śukadeva for instance: whether seated on the royal throne or spitted at by men – it is all the same for Śukadeva.

Q: What is the significance of the mantra you have imparted to us?

A: The term "svāhā" that is in the mantra means surrendering oneself fully. As for the term "vallabhāya" (that occurs in the mantra) it has two senses. One sense is: "To him who is the remover of the darkness of ignorance." If the term is interpreted in this way, the term "gopījana" will mean "all jīvas" (individual soul); thus, the two terms together will mean – "To Him who destroys the ignorance of the jīva (sādhaka)". "Vallabha" means "the beloved" (person). Now, the object dearest to us all is Atman (Self). On this interpretation, "vallabhāya" means – "to Him who is the dearest of all to all jīvas." Besides, it may also signify – "One who is dear to the Vraja-gopīs" (the gopīs of Vrindavana). This is the meaning from the outside, it is not the essential meaning of the mantra. However, there is nothing wrong in that (the latter sense). Nevertheless, acāryas (teacher predecessors in the Nimbārka tradition) have not interpreted it in this way; it is the first-mentioned significance which they have accepted.

Q: During japa is there any flow of energy in the body?

A: Don't you feel it yourself? While doing japa don't you feel your body becoming light? While seated in āsana and performing japa, don't you feel anything?
The disciple was forced to admit that he feels nothing of the kind. At this Santadasji Maharaj said: "Indeed there is infusion of energy, but you don't feel it because of the drainage of energy. Even when energy is infused you often fail to perceive it owing to unmindfulness. The channel has been opened; it is for you now to make the necessary effort. When I spoke about the drainage of energy during japa what I meant is that ojas is dissipated owing to kāma and krodha – notwithstanding infusion of energy. Always try to keep your temper calm. If anyone practices japa regularly, there must be genuine experience. If one does japa with full concentration and in a proper manner there will be an active play of energy.

Socrates and the Rishis

Someone present mentioned, as an example of extraordinary patience, an incident from the life of Tukaram, the great Marathi saint. He was coming home, one day, with a bunch of sugarcanes. On the way, these sugarcanes were robbed on by one of the boys on the street; only one remained. His wife seeing this flew into a rage and seizing that one sugar cane that was left, broke it into two pieces on her husband's head. At this, Tukaram said to his wife: it is very well – what you have done. Now take one of the two pieces, you take one and I take the other.

Maharajji: Yes, my son; great men practice (the sādhanā of) patience in this way. But the remark of Socrates is more delectable – "a heavy downpour after thunder"; there is great sense of humour in these words. There cannot be real humour without ānanda. From this remark of Socrates' delight is flowing in abundance.

Q: Maharaj! Was Socrates established in the same Truth as our ṛṣis of old?

A: Well, my son! Don't compare this land of ours with any other. It has no parallel anywhere else in the world.

Q: But Socrates' drank poison with an unperturbed mind.

A: Yes he did. It is also true that he was spiritually highly advanced. Nevertheless, he cannot be compared with the ṛṣis. Theirs is a different matter altogether. They had become one with God. If they wished, they could do anything; it was only the wish that was needed. They were satyasaṃkalpa – that is their will was always true. They remained in this world after attaining the state of a ṛṣi. They didn't care for either pāpa or puṇya; they had crossed beyond both pāpa or puṇya – sin and virtue.

SAYINGS AND ANECDOTES

Every activity of ours – eating, sleeping and so on – has a rule; if I want a son – even that has a rule to be observed. If every act is performed in accordance with the injunctions of the śāstras you will gradually be lead towards the road to liberation.

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The Guru gives initiation to the disciple; he thus only sows the seed. But if the disciple does not sprinkle water on the seed by earnestly devoting himself to sādhanā he cannot expect quick attainment of the fruit.

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At the time of initiation (dīkṣā) the power of the Guru is infused in the disciple. This power will at first remain mixed with other things; later they will separate.
The power of the Guru passes into the disciple. When one says that so and so is a pupil of such and such person or such and such kavirāaj (an Āyurvedic physician) – it implies that the power of the Guru has been installed into some of the disciples.

When somebody approaches for initiation, I first find out whether there is real earnestness in him. I test him by asking a few questions; if I find an intense yearning, I initiate him. Hence I impart mantra affixed with praṇava (OṂ) to persons belonging to all castes. That is what I myself used to do; nevertheless, I won't say that this is the general rule.

The house-holder who wishes to get initiation to the path of abstinence (from the world) is fully entitled to do so from a Guru who is a sannyāsin. Have there not been fully illumined souls, Brahman-knowers, among house-holders? Great ṛṣis like Vaśiṣṭha and Yāgñavalkya were house-holders. There is also initiation along a path of worldly enjoyment (pravṛtti-mārga) – for those who desire a passage to heaven and so on.

When one conceives a strong aversion towards worldly enjoyments (bhoga) one has to resort to a sannyāsin Guru.

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Even if one gets a mantra in a dream one should receive it from living Guru; this is written in Tantrasāra.

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Before resorting to a Guru the first thing you should make sure of is that he belongs to a continuous and unbroken line of Gurus. If the Guru himself, in that case, is not sufficiently powerful, the Guru-śakti passes into the disciple. The thing to be ascertained is whether he belongs to a continuous line of Gurus. Even if in the body of that Guru the śakti of the Guru-parampara (line of Gurus) is not fully developed, it is instilled in the disciple. In (biological) "science" it is sometimes seen that a disease or a special faculty, instead of being transmitted to the son passes into the grandson. We regard as (spiritually) a great soul one who belongs to a distinguished tradition; otherwise he will lack the power to deliver one from saṃsāra. We have our links established with the Guru-parampara. If a Guru belonging to a paramparā is not powerful enough, the disciple may imbibe this power (Guru-śakti). The power is infused into the

mantra and this power mingles with his (the disciple's) "system". The Guru establishes his own Guru in the body of the disciple. God does not permit everybody to initiate others. A father may have five sons for instance; yet it may so happen that one or two among them do not have any progeny.

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(To a young disciple) Do your work steadfastly, prompted by a sense of duty. The fruit of your action is not in your hands. Don't cherish any regret in your mind. While doing your work keep your mind calm. It is only doing your work that is within your control. Don't keep an eye on the fruit (of your action). I have seen millionaire turn into a beggar; and a beggar becoming a king. Who can say what one is destined to become in future?

Suppose, that you have lost your money, or that you have failed in your examination. Adapt yourself to the circumstances. For as long as your life span extends God will see to it that you get your meals.

Always remain steady and calm. Do as it is demanded by the circumstances. What does it avail you if you keep worrying all the time: "What will happen to me?" It only causes mental disturbance. "Select your duty and then do it" – if you can keep up such an attitude in your mind you will get peace. There is no real happiness in any external object. Remain calm in your mind, that alone will enable you to achieve happiness. In whatever sphere God may place you, go on doing your work, and never slacken your enthusiasm."

A vaiṣṇava was speaking about preaching their ideas. At this, Gurudeva (Śrī Śrī Santadas Kathia Babaji Maharaj) remarked: "In former times the method of preaching was that one would oneself become pure-hearted through sādhana and bhajana and people would come to him attracted by their example.

Become spotless yourselves – that will do the preaching automatically. First deliver yourself."

One day, Śrī Śrī Santadasji Maharaj was pacing up and down a large room. Śrī Śiśir Kumar Brahmacāri (S.K.B.), a disciple of his, at that time, was by his side. Suddenly, Maharajji was heard remarking: "Nobody, my son, wants God. If anybody really did, he would find him." Considerably surprised, the young disciple asked: "What, then, about the thousands of sādhus and sannyāsins one comes across at Kumbhamelas." Maharajji replied: "My son! The truth is that most of them run after fame, wealth, power and glory, the exalted position of a Mahant and so on."

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The assumption of the physical body inevitably involves pain and suffering. Given the option, no intelligent person would think of coming back (to this world) for a second time."

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One day, Maharajji, accompanied by a few of his young disciples of whom Śrī Kṛṣṇadasji Maharaj was one, was walking along a narrow partition wall separating two paddy fields. At that moment a question arose in the mind of Kṛṣṇadasji. The question was this, "We have read in the sacred texts about such a thing as "śuddha sattva" (pure sattva-guṇa) I do not understand what the term means. Will you kindly explain?" At this Maharajji stopped and told his disciples to sit down on the partition wall, which he himself did at once. What he said in reply to this question was this. "Of the three guṇas, which are always present together, it is always one that is dominant; the other two is subordinated to it. Now, when we say some person or some object is "sāttvika", full of sattva-guṇa, what we really mean is that sattva-guṇa alone exists, so that there is no rajas or tamas, and hence, no question of their being dominated by sattva. This is what is meant by "śuddha-sattva".

One day somebody was reading aloud the famous story of the boy Dhruva related in Śrīmad Bhāgavata. All the people present there were listening with rapt attention. When the story ended Santadasji Maharaj remarked: "For a boy of five such a state of spiritual accomplishment – this is indeed a "record". Hearing this remark Kṛṣṇadasji Maharaj, an intelligent young disciple of

high academic distinction, ran into raptures. The reaction of his Gurudeva to this effusive outburst from the young disciple, was the last thing that latter would have expected, particularly after the glowing compliment on Dhruva. So far from being pleased, Maharajji severely snubbed him saying, "What's the matter? He (Lord Viṣṇu) appeared like a big lord, conferred a boon and then left! Is this real attainment (of the Divine)?" Kṛṣṇadasji was dumbfounded and sat there – silent and crest-fallen. After a while, breaking the ominous stillness, turning to the young man he said, "Keep your hopes fixed on the highest" (realization).

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To become a Brahmavit (Brahman-knower) means to become a "natural man".

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It is the "ahaṃ" (ego, self-sense) which is the "original sin."

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If a person arrogates to him the title of a Guru, through conscious egoism – the Guru-śakti becomes so tainted, so degraded that it becomes quite ineffectual."

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Power is never hidden in one place. You sit still near a Mahatmā; you will see, after he has left, that you have developed within you some kind of energy. Everybody infuses energy into everyone else. This is what is called "keeping company" (sañga).

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If you surrender yourself as fully subservient (to the Guru) you will attain your goal easily. Guru-śakti is indeed flowing constantly. Power itself is felt quickly in him who can surrender himself. In the degree to which you keep your ego standing, the full play of energy will be delayed.

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If you approach sādhus you may feel their power. But they will transmit their power, no matter whether they are far or near – they will transmit their energy from everywhere. Sun rays are visible everywhere but it is only when these rays are converged through a lens that they can cause fire. Their power will come from afar; and yet, it may be that you are unable to sustain it; it is getting reflected, so to speak. When the source of power comes nearer you feel it more.

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Once, Maharajji, in a letter addressed to a young disciple had written among other things: "your high state (after death) has been pre-ordained." So far being delighted, the recipient of the letter (Śrī Śiśir Kumar Brahmachari – S.K.B.) was disappointed. He made up his mind to let his Gurudeva know how he reacted to it and as soon as he met Maharajji and found him alone, he remarked in a voice loud enough to be heard by Maharajji who was standing nearby: "I shall become a "daroga" (a high ranking police officer) after death" (needless to say, these words were uttered deliberately). Maharajji quickly turned round and retorted sharply "Will you please tell me what you understand exactly by "spiritual progress"? Is it - spiritual progress – something like developing four hands instead of two? Is that your idea of spiritual progress"? Then, after this stern remonstrance, Maharajji, in a softened voice explained to S.K.B. what spiritual progress means – namely progressive expansion of the mind.

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S.K.B. , who seldom, if ever, spoke ill of others was once compelled to admit to his Gurudeva that he was finding it increasingly difficult to get on with a certain person who was an inmate of the āśrama. Santadasji Maharaj heard it all, calmly and then replied by putting a question to the

young disciple who was an uncompromising moralist: "What is the definition of Prakṛti?" S.K.B.'s promptly reply: "It is the state of equilibrium (sāmyāvasthā) of the three guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas).

Maharajji: "Then how would you define Creation?"

S.K.B. : "Creation starts with the disturbance of this primordial state of Cosmic equilibrium."

Maharajji: "Very good. Now if this is so, it follows – I hope you will admit – that Creation is essentially a process of progressive diversification, a movement from uniformity (Prakṛti) to diversity. Hence it is, that no two things in this world are exactly same. The same is true of persons. No two persons, in other words, can be exactly alike; differences of attitude, temperament, ways of thought and modes of feeling must exist. If you accept this you will have to admit that no person with whom you can deal can be wholly after your heart nor will his actions be entirely to your liking. This is inevitable since variety and diversity are the essence of Creation.

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The mind must be brought under control. It is absolutely indispensable. First, the observance of Brahmacarya (holy living) accompanied by sexual continence and moral discipline."

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Spending money for a good work or a noble purpose is not to be regarded as expenditure at all; it is returned four-fold. God does not remain indebted to anyone.

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One day, Moanohardas, a very young sādhu disciple of Maharajji, who was then staying at Madhupur (in Jharkhand) had gone to the station for some purpose. He got himself weighed there on a weighing machine. A simple innocent boy from Vrajabhumi (around Vrindavan) came

back in high spirits and delighted, and said to his Gurudeva: "Baba, I have been weighed; my weight is now nearly a maund (roughly 37 Kgs)". Astonished, Maharajji returned: What! How can you be weighing a maund? The boy said, "Why I have been weighed. These brother disciples of mine too have seen it." To this Maharajji replied: "How can you be weighed? Are you a limited object that can be weighed?" The boy said: "No. its not that – the body has been weighed." Maharajji said: "Why not say so – that it is the body that has been weighed? Are you and your body identical? The body is made of the five elements; its here at this moment but there is no knowing when it will cease to exist. You are the un-decaying, immortal Ātman, how can you be weighed? Now you are healthy and well-nourished, a time will come when it will decay and then at last, be dissolved. After all, it is not ever-lasting; so, at its decay or growth there is nothing to be distressed or delighted. In this body God dwells as the Ātman; hence, it is His temple. On the other hand, it is through this body that service is rendered to God and all His creatures; so, this is also an instrument. This is why it ought to be maintained in a state of cleanliness in order to keep it fit and active. It has also to be tended and taken care of by food and sleep. The body is not you; you are separate from the body – the Ātman. Try to keep this in mind constantly.

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If Bhagavat-bhajana (devotion to and worship of God) is not done by this body, if it is only used for eating and sleeping, then what's the good if it continues and what's the harm if it goes?

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Towards those who tend to criticize the śāstras in a "patronizing" attitude the śāstras become so angry that they reveal nothing to them.

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Our religious "ceremonies" have been evolved as a result of experience. They are considerably effective. Fasting does good not only to the gross body but also to the subtle body. Fasting is

certainly conducive to spiritual amelioration; there is no human activity in this world that is done solely by the gross body or solely by the subtle body. The mind is "affected" by the bodily activity while the body is affected by mental activity. Yesterday my head became heated owing to mental exertion; I had to cool it by rubbing it (head) with oil and water. One of the gravest errors of English (Western) education is to think that there is no connection between eating and other bodily activities on the one hand and mind on the other – drink alcohol and see what happens. You will then realize whether there is any relation between mind and the kind of food you eat. Insanity is cured by medicine; so, eating particular kind of food sets the mind right. Now, all these, like smearing oil or taking medicine are external things; and don't they help to cool the mind?

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Place: Waiting room of Dehradun station.

Santadasji Maharaj and his wife were seated there. Standing nearby was S.K.B., moving the fan with a rope rhythmically and slowly (electric fans were yet to appear on the scene). Perhaps it was the sound of sobbing that made Maharajji turn to the young man. To his surprise he found that the latter was weeping copiously – tears streaming down his cheeks. Maharaji asked him, "what's the matter?" It was then that the long pent-up despair found an outlet. The young man said in a voice choaked with tears of anguish, "receiving dīkṣā has done me no good at all. Please take it back. If anything, the restlessness of my mind has increased after initiation. When I was in Śrīha.ṭṭa before my initiation, as a Congress worker I spent hour after hour in solitude performing nāma-japa on a hillock. Now, when I sit down to do japa my only thought is how soon I shall get up. Not only that; I possessed such a strong will force, when I sat down practicising japa, it was impossible for anyone who sat there to indulge in evil thoughts. Now let alone influencing others' minds, I cannot even calm my own. It seems therefore that this dīkṣā has done me more harm than good." "In my agitated state" – S.K.B. told me, "I continued in this vein. Baba (Maharajji) silently listened to it all. Then he said, "Hai Ramji. This is nothing but Guru-kṛpā". A strange kind of Guru-kṛpā – no doubt. Baba continued. "This is nothing but a play of the will, a play of the ego. It will not last for long. It is this ego (ahaṃ) that is the original sin, the Guru is there to crush it. And he had already begun to do so. Know it to be the path that

leads to supreme well-being. The one obstacle to Self-realization is this ahaṃ. The Guru will shatter it to pieces and thus purify the mind of the disciple. So, know it to be Guru-kṛpā for certain. You won't understand it now, will do so in time." Saying this, he kept gently passing his hand on my back. He said, after a pause, "You should read the Yoga-sūtras of Patañjali. In it, all the states of the sādhaka have been described. You will realize then your own spiritual state at the present moment.

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Never indulge in such thoughts as: "My life has come to nothing." Everyday your body is changing; but you cannot perceive that. Don't give way to despair because you haven't made any progress overnight. Just remember, those who made great spiritual advance – for how many years they had to practice ascetic austerities (tapasyā).

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The primary meaning of "Yoga" is Samādhi. When the (citta) of the sādhaka is so deeply absorbed in meditation that it becomes wholly identified with the object of meditation, so that he even forgets that he is performing the act of meditation and even the remembrance of himself totally disappears – that state is called Samādhi; and when the mind turning away from all perception of external objects is drawn inwards and thus becomes free from all outward-turning tendencies, so that no object of meditation is present in it (citta) and nothing appears as the object of knowledge; in this state the mind (citta) becomes totally void of all mental phenomena (cittavṛtti). This state of mind is the consummation of yoga (siddhāvasthā). As nothing in this state of mind is present as an object of knowledge, it is called asamprajñāta samādhi. In this state the citta rests in that pure sāttvika ānanda (bliss) that constitutes its essential nature.

Meditation is performed by Buddhi (the higher intelligence); hence, this meditation has as its object the Puruṣa (who is pure consciousness) who dwells in Buddhi; for Buddhi in order to reach Parabrahman has to transcend its own nature, which it cannot do. The Puruṣa (Person) who dwells in the Cosmic Principle of Buddhi (Mahat) has been called Hiraṇyagarbha in the śāstras.

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Even the fully illumined Brahman-knower is established, while alive, in Hiraṇyagarbha, whose essence, free from all self-sense (ahaṃ), is constituted by pure sattva-guṇa; it is only after the fall of the physical body that he attains union with Parabrahman.

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One day Santadasji Maharaj was seated as usual on an easy chair outside his room at Shibpur Ashram. Seated below, by his side was S.K.B; there was nobody else. At this moment came there Śrī Saradā Prasanna Das, the illustrious professor of mathematics, who was an elder brother-disciple of Maharajji. Professor Das who had, at that time been studying the Monistic (Advaita) Vedanta of Śaṃkarācārya with great admiration, started discussing Advaita Vedanta with Maharajji. Maharajji heard him with attention. As soon as prof. Das ended his discourse Maharajji stood up and holding his hand: "Saradābabu, let us go into the room." S.K.B. too stood up, intensely curious to hear what his Gurudeva would say next. After hesitating for a moment whether he should follow them, he finally yielded to irresistible curiosity and slipped into the room. What happened after that, let us hear from S.K.B. himself, "I was standing by the wall. Still holding the hand of Saradābabu, Baba said: "let me tell you something. What I am going to tell you now actually happened. I was then in my former state (of a house-holder). I was then studying the concept of the cosmic principle (Mahat-tattva). I pondered it deeply and long but failed to form a clear conception of it. I even meditated on it one day for a considerable time,

and yet the concept of "Mahat" (Buddhi) eluded my understanding. I gave it up in despair. Long afterwards I went to Vrindavan during the Puja Holidays. I prostrated myself before Babaji Maharaj (Śrī Śrī Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj). Then suddenly he addressed me saying: "Ah! What's there in it? Look, here it is – the Mahat-tattva." As soon as he said thi, the nature of Mahat-tattva, flashed across my mind as vividly as a scene shown in a bioscope (cinema). So I tell you Saradābabu, it is impossible to grasp these principles (tattva) through intellectual speculation and discursive argument. You pray to Babaji Maharaj – you will be able to understand everything through his grace. What I have told you just now, I repeat, actually happened. After a pause, Baba repeated: "Saradābabu, I tell you again – pray to Babaji Maharaj. You will then be able to know the true nature of every tattva (principle).

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The name (nāma) and the deity (nāmī) that it stands for, are one. Regarding the power of nāma all the śāstras and all spiritual masters are at one. Consciously or unconsciously, in whatever manner you practice nāma, some good saṃskāras must be aroused under its influence – some degree of sāttvika state must be generated, whether you know it or accept it or not. Whenever in this life you have done nāma-japa, in whatever manner, you must have derived some benefit at least. May be the extent of benefit was not appreciable enough to be felt by you, so you could not perceive it. Go on practicising nāma-japa, sooner or later, its benefit will become perceptible by you. The result of nāma-japa is infallible.

Make it a point to read the śāstras everyday at regular hours; if you do so, the meaning will come out from within yourself. The better śāstras are, for instance: 1. The Bhagavadgītā 2. Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3. The Bhāgavata 4. The Upaniṣads.
With us, in India, Upaniṣads are supreme among the śāstras – there is nothing above them. They are like the mother of all śāstras. All do not have equal competence (adhikāra); so, some may find it difficult to understand them.

Meditation will not sink into your mind if you do not observe the rules of holy conduct. The Śruti has declared: "Even the Vedas cannot purify who is devoid of holy conduct" (ācārahīnantu na punanti vadāḥ).

The power of mantra (sacred sound) is greater than the power of visible form (rūpa). The meditation on sound (śabda) is greater than meditation of form (rūpa). If you can meditate on the sound, the form will automatically manifest itself.

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If you aspire after spiritual progress you must observe the rules of holy living (Brahmacarya) and sexual continence. Without sexual continence – retention of semen - the mind can never be still; and if the mind is not still, spiritual progress is impossible.

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To be a real fakir (an ascetic who owns nothing) is very difficult; he must not have any attachment to anything. Say, one is staying now in a big mansion when it is raining heavily outside. If he has to leave this house at this very moment and remain standing outside under a tree, without a least disturbance of mind and can do that naturally – he alone is a true fakir.

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In East Bengal (now Bangladesh) during the rainy season, often entire villages are flooded, so that sometimes one has to board a raft while moving from one room to another across a large courtyard. It was in such a village during the rains that Santadasji Maharaj was staying. It was late in the evening. S.K.B., who was then with Maharajji, was asked to bring something from

another distant room across the courtyard. It was dark and raining heavily, and the means of conveyance was, as mentioned before, a raft. It was not at all a pleasant job to do – it hardly needs remarking. Naturally, even a brave and tireless young man like S.K.B. hesitated for a moment. Maharajji noticed it and addressing him said: "My son, we are sannyāsins. The proper place for us is not a building, not even a simple cottage like this, but under a tree. Compared to that we are now, even here, quite comfortable and cosy." At this remark, S.K.B. feeling a little ashamed of himself, immediately left the room and went out into the gloom and rain outside.

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Do you worship God for advancement in the sphere of worldly enjoyment? This is not real bhakti – this is a kind of business transaction.

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Natural simplicity, truthfulness and true correspondence between the inward and the outward – God is more kind towards one who possesses these qualities. "Too much cleverness leads one to one's hanging by rope" – this Bengali saying is correct.

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A vital question, a question of almost life and death had been agitating the minds of two distinguished young disciples of Santadasji Maharaj and yet, precisely because the matter was one of gravest concern and utmost importance to both of them that none of them dared to put the portentious question to their Gurudeva. So, naturally, they hesitated. Now, one of them was much bolder than the other. But when the urgency of the matter became almost intolerable, the bolder among the two, could bear it no longer and accompanied by the other entered the room

of Santadasji Maharaj one day. Maharajji was lying in bed, with eyes closed. (Incidentally, his closed eyes in this posture indicated nothing; he could very well have been lying wide awake in this state.) The braver one among the two disciples now mustered all the courage he could command and then suddenly blurted out: "Baba! (Maharajji had already opened his eyes) we have a question to ask you." Maharajji in a very tender and soft voice said: "Ye, my son, what is it?" It was then the thing came out. "Baba", the disciple continued, "shall we attain Brahman-knowledge in this birth?" Maharajji sat up on the bed, and then said slowly and tenderly: "When I was young I read in the newspaper that a certain elderly woman, when she came to learn that she had won one of the Derby races (in England) and would get a prize of rupees one lakh (a sum of money which must have been fabulous in those days). The result was – the poor woman instantly died; she could not endure the shock, the shock of joy. My son, I related to you this event to bring home to you the fact that not all human bodies are fit to endure joy beyond a certain point of intensity, let alone the delight, the ineffable bliss that one experiences after Brahman-realization." At this, the two young men knew that Brahman-realization was for them a far cry.

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If money is well spent it cannot taint you. If you have money you will have a tendency to despise others. He whom God gives wealth has one great benefit, namely, he is able to make good use of money; otherwise money tends to make one's heart narrow and mean. Even if you have, rest content with what you have got – isn't that enough for you? If God so wills, He will give you more; but you shouldn't grumble because you didn't have more.

I tell you – the more you can keep your hands open the more you gain. Spend money for good purposes. Don't feel disturbed because you don't earn much. To the best of your ability to help the poor and the distressed, and thus make your hands clean and pure. Your heart too will thus be purified. The knot of money is not an easy one to losen; it is not easy to part with one's own money. Its seduction is great. Try your best to be open-handed. It opens up the gates of fortune.

If ten people (that is, a large number) come to your house (as guests) things will come to you through their fortune. If you bring up and look after ten people as far as your means permit – then through their good luck, money will come to you. If your hands are opened you will develop an attitude of non-attachment to a considerable extent. I do not of course mean to say that you shouldn't save money, but you shouldn't pay much attention to this. In the mantras that are uttered during our śrāddha ceremony, we find: "let me have guests; let me have suppliants; may I be able to fulfil their prayers." If this happens the heart will open.

You must have noticed that those who are generous with their money in this world are cordially loved by people around. Even if one has a very limited income he will earn a good name if he is open-handed. Don't feel dejected because your earnings are small. One's fortune opens up at the blessings of a number of persons.

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If you are to "cultivate" the "best mood of mind" you should go on doing your assigned work under all circumstances – with joy. In proportion as one can develop this attitude of mind, one is able to attain peace.

Your duty is to exert yourself; the fruit of your work is not in your hands. Whatever work you do you should do without a feeling of discontent; this is what is called "resignation" in English – that is to say, self-surrender. Without this attitude no one can attain peace.

In whatever condition the Providence has placed you, you should go on doing your work as best as you can. Consider the example of Mahesh Bhattacharya. He would borrow a few paise from mess-mates and transact business – buying and selling throughout the say, and with this small profit that he earned he would eat very little and go out the following day to do business. He lived in a dark, abandoned room of the mess. What remained in his hands after repaying his debts he would do his buying and selling in the streets everyday. Acting in this manner he is now running a business involving several lakhs of rupees. He would conduct himself as the

situation demanded and circumstances permitted. He is a very energetic person – not one to languish easily.

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In all our activities of this world, there is peace at one place and unrest at another. Whether it is "success or failure" there (in saṃsāra) it makes no difference so far as unrest is concerned. Here (in the realm of the spirit) there is no unrest, no lack of peace. This is the general truth. Unrest presupposes discontent; that is, we don't find saticfaction in what we have. In this world of ours (saṃsāra) when one gets something one ceases to care for it; then one wants something new. One ceases then to feel any satisfaction in it. No matter what it is, after enjoying for sometime, one no longer feels any attraction towards it. Here the more something is mastered, the greater will become the attraction for it.

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Santadasji Maharj used to tell S.K.B. that Pātañjala Darśana (the Yoga-sūtras of Patañjali) is the mirror in which the sādhakas, of no matter what persuation or what religion, can see their exact spiritual advance. How immensely important, how illuminating these Yoga-sūtras and the commentary on them by Vyāsa (in the eyes of Maharajji the latter is quite as authentic as the original Yoga-sūtras themselves) are, is strikingly illustrated by an incident. S.K.B. like innumerable sādhakas of modern India, held Jesus Christ in the highest esteem. At the time in question S.K.B.'s mind was persistently exercised by a thought concerning Jesus Christ. So, one day, he approached his Gurudeva and asked him the question that pre-occupied him for quite sometime: "Baba, I have read that Christ once said – "I and my father are one." Now, isn't this the supreme realization, Brahman-realization? In reply, Maharjji then asked him to find out from the text the sūtra and the commentary on it (by Vyāsa) where the supremely exalted state of prajñā (wisdom or enlightenment) is described. This state is characterized by what is called,

"sattvapuruṣānyatākhyāti" – a term which means "the state of knowledge" in which the Puruṣa (Ātman) is perceived as different from sattva" or "buddhi". After the sūtra with the commentary by Vyāsa was read out from the text (the book in question had been written by Santadasji Maharaj himself many years ago, before he had becomea sannyāsin) by S.K.B., Maharajji remarked: "So you see now that the realization by Jesus Christ expressed by that famous statement is possible in this state of sattvapuruṣānyatākhyāti. It is no doubt a very, very high state of realization; nevertheless, it is not Brahman-knowledge – the supreme Realization.

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Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhusan was one of the most learned Brāhmaṇas of those times. Many years later Pandit Sitanath Tatvabhusan had written a Bengali translation of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad; there is a very famous Chapter in that very ancient Upaniṣad where the secret and profoundly symbolical sacrificial rite called pañcāgni vidyā is described. Now in this Chapter which deals with this famous vidya at one place there is vivid description of the female genital organ. Pandit Tattvabhusan, who was a devoted Brāhma and a strict moralist, had omitted this passage. Santadasji Maharaj (who was then in Shibpur Ashram) while listening to the book which was being read by S.K.B. at his wish had noticed this omission. At this moment he turned to S.K.B. and remarked: "Hai Ramji! What a great pity that the scholar had made such a regrettable mistake. It is plain from this deliberate omission that Pandit Mahashay didn't realize that the sexual congress between man and woman is a holy rite – a sacred Yajña; that is why he had been so deeply shocked by a description in the Upaniṣad which must have struck him as indelicate, if not downright obscene."

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(related by Śrī Suśīl Kumar Roy)

One day in the evening, many people have come. A variety of topics are being discussed. A certain gentleman, I do not exactly remember in what context, said: "Gonsaiji, as we all know, used to live with his wife." I had never seen such an angry outburst in Babaji Maharaj (Santadasji Maharaj). "What!" He remarked sharply, "what did you say? He used to live with his wife? Do you know – after his death he lingered for three days by virtue of his yogic powers? That he left his physical body only after he had paid off the debts he had incurred for the setting up of the Ashrama at Puri? He used to sit up through the whole night in yogāsana; can you sit still in āsana for even two hours?" the gentleman got up slowly and then left.

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When one is subjected to humiliation and insult, one must feel special grace for purification. One's real life – spiritual life, does not even begin until one can accept insult cheerfully. It is only when He will bring one close to Him sends insults and humiliation. Physical pain many can endure but to endure slights and insults is far more difficult.

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It is the desires that spring from identifying one's self with the body which constitute the impurities of the mind. In the degree to which this desire and identification with the body will diminish your mind is said to have attained purity.

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As the subject one day centred around Śrī Vijay Kṛṣṇa Goswami, Maharajji said, "How Gonsaiji, through intense spiritual effort (sādhana) rose, slowly, stage by stage to what dizzy heights has not been rightly brought out in his extant biographies. In these biographies much the same

states of spiritual development have been shown from beginning to end (of his life); consequently, the greatness of his life as a sādhaka has not been specifically brought to light. How through strenuous spiritual effort he ascended from one truth to another on a higher level – this aspect of his sādhanā, and the extraordinary grandeur of it, has not been brought out in an adequate manner by these biographers. On accout of this tremendous sādhanā he had attained a very high status among all sādhus and sannyāsins of India. The authors on his life failed to notice the great beauty of this idea.

The sādhanā of Goswami Prabhu – how extraordinary, how unique the intensity of it! When he was staying at a house on Amherst Street he only left his āsana after twelve at night and slept for only one and a half to two hours. After that he would return to his āsana and enjoy only intermittent sleep for a few minutes at a stretch. How exceedingly, tremendously hard all this – this sādhanā is!

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The pleasure that is generated by sense enjoyment is called bhoga – it is not real happiness. In proportion as sattvaguṇa in man increases and in consequeance the mind becomes pure he begins to experience real happiness. It springs from the blissful serenity of the Ātman. You should ponder in this connection the statement in the Bhagavadgītā: "sattvaṃ sukhe sañjayati" (sattvaguṇa leads to happiness).

I have served this saṃsāra for a period which is more than double your present age; I have received considerable honour, fame and so on, and I have earned a lot of money; and I have seen many persons who earned even more than I did; but nowhere have I seen real happiness and peace. This is why I have renounced it (saṃsāra); if I had found happiness and peace in saṃsāra I do not think I would have the wish to leave it behind.

If you ever feel a craving for reputation you should shake it off by thus praying to God: "Thakur! I am doing what you are making me do. You cannot, at all events, do more. If you are dissatisfied even after that – I cannot help it." There is no cause for despair. Even a little of this dharma (Karma-yoga) saves one from great peril as the Gita says: "svalpamapasya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt"

Remember the example of the sage Durvasas. The Gopīs after coming to this side of the river cannot find, when the time for returning came, any boat to take them on the other side. They fed the sage sumptuously. After finishing the meal he turned to the Gopīs and said: "Tell the river Yamuna – "if Durvasas has taken no food then show us the way across the river." What you gave me as food is made up of five elements. They have dissolved in this body which too is made up of these five elements. Durvasas himself has eaten nothing."

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When a son is born in a family a nurse is appointed to look after him. She earns money by nursing the child. She serves you so that she can send money to home. This job of hers does not stick to her. You should remain in the saṃsāra like this. "After death I shall go to Him which is my real abode. As long as He keeps me here, in this saṃsāra, I shall do all my works for service to Him. You have kept us in this saṃsāra making one of us "play the role of" son, mother, father and so on.

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You should not worry about your son and other close relations thinking all the time – "what will happen? What is in store for us?" You are a servant, so you do everything in that spirit. If this happens, all actions become sweet as honey. In such a state you wholly belong to God – where then is Māyā? Performing all acts in this spirit of a servant the sense of ego (ahaṃ) will go.

The more your self-sense and egoism diminish the better for your spiritual well-being. To rid yourself of this self-sense and egoism – you should know as the chief fruit of all spiritual striving, all sādhanā.

Just as bhakti arises in your heart when you see an image of the Divine and feel humble in His presence, so he, who cultivates the habit of seeing God in all beings and definitely knows the Divine is present just as much as in the bodies of all creatures as in the divine image – how can he become proud and arrogant instead of being meek and humble? It is owing to finding faults in others that one feels contempt towards them. For him, who strives to see God everywhere, this fault-finding tendency begins to diminish; consequently the disdainful attitude ceases, and begins to be replaced by an attitude of reverence towards all.

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Q: How does the attitude of surrender come?

: You read books and yet why don't you have clear conceptions? Just as men who are threatened with death in a big fire searches for the cool water of Ganga, so, when deeply disturbed and tormented by the conflagration saṃsāra when a person seeks refuge in a Sadguru with a deep yearning for spiritual progress he cannot help feeling this state of self-surrender. Until this feeling of surrender come nothing will happen. To use your own language (of modern science) before having a photograph one has to make a "negative" first, without which no photograph can be made, so the mind has to be made into a "negative"; it is then, and only then, that the mind will become full, otherwise nothing will be achieved. (After a brief pause) After making all efforts in all directions when one finds that no amount of exertion or effort will enable one to attain Him, one comes to have a genuine feeling of emptiness and helplessness and it is only then that real self-surrender comes.

Listen, my son. I am telling you now an incident that happened in my life long ago. The event was so fascinating that I vividly recall it. I was then in my former state of a house-holder. One day a sādhika (who was a sannyāsinī) came to me. Thinking "after all she is a woman; what will she understand of these things?" I didn't feel any respect for her at first. But at the end she silenced me. She said: "look here. Let me tell you something. If you want to have milk from a cow you will have to approach her as a calf. At the very sight of you milk will flow into her udder. If, on the other hand, you go to her with knife and scissors like a butcher and start chopping the udder into pieces you wont be able to draw out a single drop of milk. As a result, she will suffer intense pain and so will you – and what will be exuded is not milk but only blood."

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"Desire" and "will" are not the same thing. One may get it into his head that he will become a king; that is a "desire", nothing comes out of that. One must strive with a firm determination to become a king that is "will". Earlier saṃskāras will have to be changed. The mind does not easily incline to turn to something new. Nevertheless, one must exert oneself for that. One should not be daunted; one must hold onto it tenaciously.

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Once S.K.B. said to his Gurudeva: "By exercising my own will I may turn into a better man; nevertheless, I can by so willing, become worse than I am now." Santadasji Maharaj answered: "No. you cannot do even that – without His will".

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Faults and merits, good qualities and bad ones both are present in all – in some, less, in some others more. Unless one ignores them one cannot establish pleasant relations with anybody. You yourself have many faults which escape your own eyes; just as it is not desirable on that account for others to harbour malice towards you, so it is not right for you too to cherish ill-will towards others on account of their faults. This feeling of ill-will, you should know, pollutes your

mind by its presence. Hence, by eschewing it by all means try to establish warm relation with others; this, you should know, is real vaiṣṇava dharma. The truth is that what you regard as faults – even these are sent by God; He sends them because even they have some necessity. In every vessel (body) He is present; to feel malice towards any person is to feel malice towards Him.

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And remember – in your intercourse with others and your conduct in general in the degree to which guilelessness, candour and disinterested love arise in your mind you will become truly pure. Keep this aim always in your mind.

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The mind becomes pure only slowly and gradually. The quickness with which results are obtained through magic is never seen in real life; for the saṃskāras of innumerable births covering an infinitely long period of time have settled themselves in the mind; the removal of them takes a very long time. Those who can achieve this in a single birth should be considered extremely fortunate.

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During Kumbhmela (a large assemblage of sādhus held every three years -on an average - at four different holy places of India) in Vrindāvana. Sādhus used to take out long processions with drums and other percussion instruments, horses and elephants to have a dip in the Yamuna at the final stage. At that time Hindu-Muslim riots used to break out from time to time all over India. Once, such a procession was attacked by the Muslims. A minor clash occurred. On the path

followed during circum-ambulation, there stood an old, dilapidated temple of Mahāvīrji. The Muslims had virtually demolished this temple. The sādhus however bathed in the holy river without any disturbance. In the afternoon somebody said to Śrī Santadasji Maharaj: "Mahāvīr is a devoted servant of God. We know him to be divine and worship him as such. The Muslims broke Him to pieces and yet he couldn't save himself. Yet we all know that Mahāvīrji is extraordinarily powerful. What Ramachandra Himself could not accomplish Mahāvīrji did; how is it that He couldn't protect Himself? Maharajji replied with a smile: "My son! God is present everywhere. He has neither aversion nor love for anybody. Don't you know that He Himself has said this in Bhagavadgītā? After making an image of Him you worship Him with adoration. The Muslims have demolished it with contempt. To Him both are the same. It is true nevertheless that those who worship Him, want to know and attain Him – He comes close to them. Those who break his image do not wish that He should appear before them; so He too doesn't get close to Him. He gets close to a person in the form in which He is desired to be seen.

Ye yathā māṃ prapadyante tāṃstathaiva bhajāmyaham. (The Gītā)

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There was a brother disciple of S.K.B., a young sādhu, named Vanamālidās, a devoted disciple, full of deep reverence towards his Gurudeva; he was, nevertheless, sometimes assailed by doubts as whether the books Santadasji Maharaj had written when he was still house-holder expressed the full truth without any errors. He expressed these doubts once to S.K.B., and to him alone. S.K.B. however remained silent on this matter. One day when S.K.B. was with him Maharajji suddenly told him: "Vanamālidās thinks that my earlier books, written in my purvāśrama (as a house-holder) may not be entirely free from imperfections and errors. He does not know that they were written through the grace of my "Baba" (Kathia Babaji Maharaj) and with his blessings."

Similar doubts also disturbed another distinguished and highly educated young sādhu disciple of Maharajji – Kṛṣṇadasji Maharj (who had already been referred to in an earlier passage"). The

question that troubled his mind was: "Babaji Maharaj had on many occasions, in his Vedanta Darsana in particular, vehemently opposed and strongly refuted the views of Śañkarācārya and he was a house-holder, while Śañkarācārya was a sannyāsin and an ascetic of the highest order and a man of unrivalled learning and spiritual eminence. Is it credible, then that he was, always in the right and the great Ācārya wrong?" He was dying to know the answer, and yet hesitated to put the question to his Gurudeva, for it was an extremely delicate matter to ask about.

One day when his uneasiness and anguish became so great that he could not bear it any longer and decide to give vent to his agonized misgivings to Maharajji. He entered the room, where Maharajji was found lying on bed, resting with eyes closed – not knowing for certain whether his Gurudeva was asleep – he sat down on the floor below, tense with suspense and apprehension. At this moment, Maharajji opened his eyes. Kṛṣṇadasji asked with the utmost humility and with visible hesitation: "Baba, may I with your kind permission ask you a question?" at this Maharajji sat on the bed and asked, in a voice inexpressibly tender and sweet: "what is it, my son?" it was then that Kṛṣṇadasji blurted out what tormented his mind so often and so long. Maharajji heard it all, with perfect calm. Then, when Kṛṣṇadasji Kaharaj had finished, he said: "It was not I who had written these books you refer to; they were written through the grace of Babaji Maharaj." Then turning to a book that was lying on the table by the side of the bed – it was his own Vedānta Darśana – he suddenly put his hand on it and said, in a voice filled with emotion: "believe me, my son, "every word in it was inspired."

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A similar question had exercised the mind of S.K.B. himself. He however had no doubt that the contradictions and inconsistencies that his Gurudeva had pointed out so clearly and convincingly in the commentary of Śañkarācārya on the Brahmasūtra are real; but he attributed this and Śañkara's Māyavāda in general not to any inherent flaw in Samkaracharya's viewsbut to the needs of the times, that he felt and wanted to fulfil. Śañkarācārya's Māyavāda was intended not to express his highest spiritual realization but to serve the needs of the age. One

day he approached his Gurudeva specifically to ask this: whether this was the truth. Santadasji Maharaj shook his head and remarked: "No. what Ācārya Śañkara had written in his Vedānta Darśana expressed his own state of spiritual realization attained by him at that time. There is evidence in his later beautiful hymns that he had changed his views by the time he composed them, when he was nearer to a fuller apprehension of the nature of Reality. It is not therefore a question of of adapting one's views to the needs of the times; it is a true reflection of the state of his spiritual consciousness at the time he wrote his celebrated commentary on the Vedānta Darśana.

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Q: How am I to perceive God as present in all beings?

A: For instance, you regard this divine image in this temple as God Himself, and prostrate before it from outside. In like manner try to see the Divine in every object.

You will meditate on the Ātman in three ways: 1. To meditate on the manifest Divine in the heart, in the whole body; 2. This is easy. He is the Self (Ātman) of this dwelling in this vast Cosmic Body; you too are wholly included in Him. He is your Self, you are established in Him. You should think that there is nothing besides that has a separate existence. 3. The third and the last form of meditation is difficult, not at all easy. It is meditation on Him as Akṣara who is Ātman. All other thoughts, even thought about the Cosmic Form and so on, must be given up. When the mind becomes absorbed in any one of these forms of meditation, and thus begins to be settled and fixed, bliss will naturally fill the mind. As a man who, after drinking becomes rapt in joy so will bliss descend on him, drop by drop – and the sādhaka, as a result, will be filled with rapture.

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Q: Is there anything wrong in Śrī Krsna's behavior with the Gopis?

A: Can the question of right or wrong arise in relation to one's own body? One scratches one's own body when there is an itch in any part of it. What is there in it that is wrong and sinful? Śukadeva says that the external behavior of conduct of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not to be imitated by others, because He was surpassingly powerful. If you become as powerful as He is, you can behave like Him.

In the lifetime of Śrī Kṛṣṇa people had no inkling about Śrī Kṛṣṇa's intercourse with the Gopīs. It is only now that all have come to know about this by reading books.; the husbands of the Gopīs knew that their wives were always with them.

The attachment of the Gopīs to Śrī Kṛṣṇa would only lead to purification of the heart; it was only later that through parābhakti they attained mokṣa. The intention of the author of Bhāgavata is that the (carnal) feeling of the woman which is apt to lead her to hell, will, if directed towards the Divine, causes purification of the heart. The love of the Gopīs (for Śrī Kṛṣṇa) is, after all an "exceptional method".

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Q: Baba! You said that during japa śakti is transmitted. I don't however, perceive anything special. Though I have some feeling, however little it may be during japa, nothing is felt afterwards – I feel as dry as before; and yet you tell us that this mantra is very powerful. Why is this so?

A: if even the most subtle and refined feelings caused by sexual desire excites lustful thoughts and restlessness, ojas, which is the subtle and ethereal essence of the seminal fluid is dissipated by anger; the energy, that is infused through nāma-japa is sustained by this power of ojas. If ojas is dissipated what will hold this energy? Where is there in your body the ability to preserve this energy. Depleted of all energy you have become shorn of power; how are you to feel the power of nāma? Try to control and purify both your body and mind; stop all lascivious

thoughts, seminal emission and anger. First become powerful, otherwise, how can you feel the power of nāma? The nāma is charged with enormous power; you are also accumulating energy, but it is flowing out for the lack of a fit vessel for holding it. In spite of all this don't give up nāma. Don't give way to despair, make an earnest effort to become self-controlled and to cultivate wholesome and elevated thoughts.

It is for this reason that the reading of novels, watching plays dealing with mundane matters, to enjoy with gusto talks about worldly affairs - all these should be forbidden. These things tend to make the mind more restless and ojas is dissipated. Through thinking about God, talking about Him, and reading good books, lasciviousness is gradually dispelled, the mind gets purified and the energy of ojas is increased, one becomes capable of sustaining the power of nāma; and then, one begins to feel a touch of Divine Bliss. The pleasure that is generated by worldly enjoyments and satisfaction of lust are infinitely trite and contemptible compared to that Supreme Bliss (of the Divine).

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Malice is an extremely powerful form of bondage; how can you know and attain God by harbouring ill-will towards the Divine who is in all beings? If you have hostile feelings even towards one object or person – know it for certain that your path is closed. Hence, if you are hurt by someone or even humiliated by him – know that you deserve them as the consequences of your own actions; by whom you suffer these (hurts and insults) is innocent, only an occasion or instrument.

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Once Maharajji was staying at the house of Prof. Mukundadev Chattopadhyay in Khulna (in Bangladesh). A young man came and prostrating before him asked him with extreme candour,

"Baba! Why are you so? And why on the other hand, are we so different? Everybody comes to you and bows down to you, lying prostrate. Coming to you they all derive such joy; and as for us – oh, what a contrast!" In reply to this Maharajji said, "My son, I am lying at your feet all the time; that is why you fall at my feet." The young man then, was on the verge of tears and said, with deep emotion – "Baba, what a strange to hear from you! You are lying at our feet!" Maharajji replied, "Yes, my son."

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Among the young sādhu disciples of Santadasji Maharaj there was one named Divodasji. He was a stoutly-built, tall, impressive-looking man. Active, energetic and devoted, Divodasji had other qualities as well. But he had a sharp tongue; worse even, he sometimes said things that hurt others, even grievously; for his manner of speaking was caustic. One day when Maharajji was seated there in the Ashram, Divodasji was then a little distance away from him. At this moment Maharajji turned to S.K.B. who was standing nearby, and pointing to Divodasji he suddenly remarked: "He has the habit of speaking bitterly." His face wore a grave expression with a look of pensive concern and then as if muttering to himself he said: "He will have to suffer; there's no escape from it." Not long after this, Divodasji, the sturdy-looking tall handsome young sannyāsin – was attacked with phthisis, to which, after a protracted illness, he succumbed.

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Though not distinguished by an imposing presence like Divodasji, Paraśuramdasji, another sādhu disciple of Maharajji was something of a physical culturist, a body-builder who could well have been a redoubtable wrestler. Not long after his initiation (as a sannyāsin), however, had been attacked with malarial fever at Vrindavan. The fever would abate for a few days after taking Edward's Tonic but come back with renewed fervour. The fever was persistent, though

intermittent, so that even such a strong man gradually became weak and emaciated, almost a shadow of his former self. One day, Maharajji spoke to S.K.B. about this and said: "I have heard that Ranchi (where S.K.B. happened to be a teacher at a well-known Brahmacarya Vidyālaya) is a healthy place with a salubrious climate. Many people go there for a change to improve their health. I was thinking that staying there for sometime may improve their health. What do you say about that?" S.K.B. naturally welcomed the suggestion; at the same time, however, he was considerably surprised. What caused his surprise was that while speaking to him like this, Maharajji – so at least it seemed to him – looked not only somewhat sad but even helpless. "Here is a man", he reflected, "so supremely exalted in his spiritual stature and yogic power who is desperately trying to think out a solution or a remedy for a baffling problem. The answer to this bewildering question came a few days later, when Maharajji pointing to Paraśuramdasji told S.K.B.: "When Paraśuramdas came to me to adopt sannyāsa his mother was disconsolate and deeply grieved; hence, this persistent illness. He will have to suffer for this; it cannot be helped.

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Q: What is the exact status of puruṣakāra (human initiative)?

A: You must have seen a river? It's rushing at great speed – and there are whirlpools in it at some places, aren't they? At first sight the whirlpools seem to be a phenomenon, contrary to the current of the river; and yet the whirlpool is produced by this current. It appears, nevertheless, that something is happening in an opposite direction to the current.

The ego-sense in your mind is like this "whirlpool".

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Q: If offered from a distance by a disciple, does the Guru accept the food?

A: In every particle, every atom, dwells One Conscious Puruṣa (Person). Whoever offers something with loving devotion (bhakti), God accepts it. What I say is indeed the truth.

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Q: You said that everything we eat should be first offered to God. What is the significance of this nivedana (offering)?

A: To offer any eatable to God means to turn it into a part of God Himself. You know that an image is made of clay; but it is divinized by mantra. In the same manner, the offered food is made into a portion of the Divine. The power, the quality of prasāda (food partaken by God) is unique. Those who regularly partake of prasāda, can, the moment they put any food in their mouth, say whether it is prasāda or not.

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Q: What is the meaning of "so'ham"?

A: You wholly exist in Him. Are you and I different? We are wholly included in, embraced by, the Cosmos. If you view your body through a microscope you will find that it is filled with billions of cells – drops of blood or semen and ovarian blood are all filled with cells. In every one of these cells there is caitanya (Consciousness) – every one of them feels its own existence. Your total being animates their separate individual beings. We are all of us wholly included in the inconceivably vast Cosmic Body which is animated by the Cosmic Puruṣa.

At one time a section of the inmates of Shibpur Āśrama had decided that all was not well with S.K.B. whom they found at fault on several counts. They grumbled among themselves and, at last, one of them was deputed to report their findings to Santadasji Maharaj. Maharajji heard the allegations against S.K.B. attentively, and then said: "bulao usko" (send for him). The summons was expeditiously served to the offender who was blissfully unaware of what had been brewing. He came immediately, and, of course, without an inkling of what was awiting him. Maharajji told him: "I have heard their complaints against you (He enumerated them). "Are they true?" Stunned S.K.B. replied, in a voice trembling with agitation and injured innocence: "Before I answer your question, please answer one of mine. It is this: "Tell me whether you are actually seeing – seeing through me. If you don't, I don't see any point in continuing to stay here; I had better pack up and go elsewhere." Maharajji heard this angry and anguished outburst calmly and then said in a gentle, almost tender tone: "Why do you expect display of the supernatural in a matter that is thoroughly trivial and mundane? All that I asked you was whether what I had heard about you are true. The answer would be simple "yes" or "no". And there the matter ends."

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On another occasion, S.K.B. had asked his Gurudeva how it is possible to remain calm and undisturbed when one is harshly and unjustly attacked or vilified with malicious intent. Maharajji's reply was unswerable, yet startling and utterly unexpected. He said: "Now, tell me what exactly takes place when you hear something. It is only a vibration in the air – which is its medium – striking the tympanum (eardrum). So, you see, hearing words is a purely physical phenomenon which has nothing to do with the mind, why should it then disturb you mentally?"

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It is not true that attachment to objects of this world diminishes as one grows older. The truth, in most cases, is the exact reverse; attachment to this world and concern for worldly matters intensifies with old age. You have seen many sādhus and sannyāsins at Kumbhamela; how many of them, do you think, renounced the world at ripe old age? Very few. Most of them left the world, took sannyāsa when they were young.

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One day, in the course of a discussion, S.K.B. reffered to the (comparatively) modern Vaiṣṇava doctrine called "Acintya bhedābheda". He asked his Gurudev, in some bewilderment, what the adjective "acintya" (unthinkable, inconscionable) exactly meant here. At this, Santadasji Maharaj remarked: "What is really incomprehensible or inconceivable to these vaiṣṇavas in particular is not bheda (difference) but abheda (non-difference) between jīva (and jagat too) and (Brahman). There is nothing mysterious or inscrutable about bheda; the sense of difference between the jīva and Brahman comes easily and naturally to all of us. The adjective acintya, therefore, does not qualify bhedābheda but only abheda.

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Bhakti is the complete sādhana for the attainment of Brahman in His fullness and totality (Pūrṇa Brahman). It has three stages (or aspects). Worshipping of and meditating on (upāsana) Brahman as manifest in all jīvas, including oneself; worshipping and meditating on Him as manifest in the Cosmos (jagat); and, finally, meditating on Him as the divine, transcendent Ground of all Existence, in His essential nature (svarūpa) as pure Consciousness-Blisss (cidānanda). By the practice of the first two stages of bhakti, the mind of the sādhaka becomes completely purified; and, finally, by the practice of the third stage of meditating on Brahman in His transcendent Essence as pure Spirit the bhakta sādhaka achieves direct experience of

Brahman, the ultimate Reality. It is a mistake, to suppose that bhakti is worship of a personal God, of saguṇa Brahman. The truth is that for the bhakta, Brahman is both saguṇa and nirguṇa.

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Sometimes, during conversations the name of Gandhiji came up inevitably, for S.K.B., as Maharajji knew, happened to be a devoted admirer of the Mahatma. On one such occasion, Maharajji said: "The mind of Gandhiji is permeated through and through with sattva-guṇa. He is "God-sent" (This is the word he actually used) and has come from –"___loka (He mentioned one of the sattva-dominated celestial realms) to fulfil a special mission. He is, spiritually, on an even higher level than your _____." (He mentioned the famous sannyāsin whom S.K.B. had held, ever since his boyhood, in the highest esteem). On another occasion, however, he remarked, addressing S.K.B. "Gandhiji is indeed a great soul. But, my son, he is not a ṛṣi. He is not infallible."

S.K.B. was once deeply shocked to learn that somewhere in North Bihar a statue of Gandhiji was built and worshipped as an avatār. He was so upset that he went up to his Gurudeva and informed him of the matter. At this, Santadasji Maharaj smiled and then made a somewhat cryptic comment, in Hindi: "Those who say he (Gandhiji) is an avatār are blind (andhe hain); and who protest saying that he is not an avatār – they too, are blind (ve bhi andhe hain). They are both alike in that they are affirming or denying something about which they know nothing.

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One thing that sometimes caused S.K.B. considerable bewilderment and disappointment was: what to him his Gurudeva's unaccountable unconcern, even indifference towards the freedom struggle of the Indian people. On this matter, one day Maharajji remarked: "you will no doubt achieve Independence soon, and the transfer of power will come so smoothly that you will

hardly become aware of it. But my son, this Independence has to be deserved, and the fact is that you don't. You are in danger, therefore, of misusing your new-won freedom from British rule. Your first concern should be to become real men; if you fail in this crucial task, Independence, no matter how desirable and intrinsically valuable it is, will do you little good."

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Another thing about his (S.K.B.s) Gurudev that he found even more puzzling and disappointing, even painfully shocking was Maharajji's frequently expressed admiration for the Western Man. Referring to them, he once remarked: "They (the Western people) are, on the whole, more sincere and earnest than you are. Hence, when they turn to something they take it seriously and do not stop till they thoroughly understood and mastered it. When they, I tell you – and the day is not far off – turn to Brahmavidyā, the supreme gift of ancient India to Mankind – they will study it with their characteristic earnestness and thoroughness and end by being profoundly impressed by it. The impact is destined to be, in days to come, not only powerful and deep, but widespread as well.

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The subject that was being discussed one day was Samādhi. Turning to S.K.B. who was present, Santadasji Maharj remarked: "Even Samādhi is, after all, a kind of "abstraction" (this is the word he actually used); for it abstracts or singles out from the Totality of Existence one particular aspect on which, and on which alone, the mind of the yogin concentrates, shutting out all other things – aspects of Reality."

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Speaking about the supreme Brahman-realization – Brahman-knowledge – he once told to S.K.B.: "The conception of Brahman is not to be found anywhere else in the world; it existed only in this land – India."

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The ṣaṭcakra mentioned by the Tantras is not in the least exaggerated; it is wholly true. It is the natural path (process) of all spiritual striving (sādhanā) – every sādhaka has to go through it. Nevertheless, the methods to be followed, while travelling along this path, are many. The aim of prāṇāyāma is to pierce these cakras (mystical circles within the subtle channel through the middle of the spinal column). As a consequence of the practice of Rājayoga too, which consists in meditation alone, the ṣaṭcakra is pierced. However, in the case of the majority of those who wish to travel along this path with the help of spiritual methods, many obstacles are encountered. The bodies of those who have had no retention of the seminal fluid break down; some develop pthisis, some turn mad, some others suffer from various digestive disorders; all of them thus suffer a great deal. As for you who have received this sādhana, if you follow this earnestly and with devotion, the channel of the ṣaṭcakra (suṣumnā) is opened up without recourse to other specialized methods.

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The topic of discussion one day happened to be nature of Vedāntic sādhana and that of the sādhaka who is best fitted to adopt it. At one point Maharajji turned to Kṛṣṇadasji Maharaj, who was present there, and asked him to bring the Vedānta Darśana (written by himself many years ago). When Kṛṣṇadasji did so, his Gurudeva told him to find out a particular sūtra (4.1.3.). Kṛṣṇadasji Maharaj opened the book at random; and, surprisingly, it was the very page in which the sūtra occurs. The sūtra which contains the essence of Vedāntic sādhanā, runs thus: "ātmeti tyupagacchanti grāhayanti ca." It means: "The Śruti says that the sādhaka should meditate on

Brahman as his very Self (Ātman) – eṣa me ātmā; and the Ācārya should tell the śiṣya (disciple) – eṣa te ātmā (He is your very Self).

When this sūtra with its Bengali translation (done by Maharajji himself many years ago) was read out Maharajji remarked: "This is the true Vedantic sādhanā which is meant for the highest adhikārin, the sādhaka whose spiritual competence and capacity are of the highest order.

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Sometimes in the late twenties (or early thirties) of this century, a violent earthquake rocked Quetta in Baluchistan (in present Pakistan). Thousands of people were killed or rendered homeless. S.K.B., like many others in (undivided) India was deeply shocked, so much so indeed, that he could not bear it any longer, and approaching his Gurudeva asked him why such terrible disasters should happen in the world God has created. In a calm voice Maharajji replied: "You are naturally upset by this; but this is because you do not see the whole, the Totality of the Cosmic Process. If you could see the whole, you would realize that everywhere in this Universe there are natural opposites (dvandva) to strike a balance, to preserve the state of equilibrium – natural opposites like heat and cold, joy and sorrow, creation and destruction are constantly at work to maintain the overall balance, to preserve the Cosmic equilibrium. Hence, natural calamities like this, deplorable as they indeed are at first sight, are nevertheless inevitable. When there is destruction in one part of the Universe, to balance it, fresh creation is taking place in another. It is all part of the Cosmic Play (Līlā).

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The desires that arise in one's own heart – these too God fulfils; the feeling of joy that is caused by it is not real peace. He whose peace of mind is not disturbed even when things happen that are contrary to his wish – he alone can attain imperturbable peace.

One day, S.K.B., entering the room where Santadasji Maharaj was lying in bed, was alarmed by a strange spectacle. He found his Gurudeva tossing in bed in what seemed to him a paroxysm of tearing pain, groaning (or almost so). Unable to bear the sight, S.K.B. asked him in visible dismay: "Baba! What is it that ails you? You must be suffering great pain." At this, Maharajji looked at him in visible surprise as if he was quite unable to follow what his disciple was talking about. Then, closing his eyes, he said, slowly and calmly: "What makes you ask this question? No, my son; Thakurji (God) has kept me always in great bliss (ānanda)." A little pause followed. Then, Maharajji continued, in same serene voice, with eyes closed: "Babaji Maharaj (his Gurudeva, Śrī Śrī Swami Ramdas Kathia Babaji Maharaj) used to say – to give dīkṣā (initiation) means, for the Guru, to burning down a whole village." That was all. There was no more the faintest suggestion of pain – no cry of anguish, no tossing; it was again the stillness, the ineffable serenity of the calm, unfathomable, unbounded ocean. Unutterably puzzled and dumbfounded, S.K.B. turned; and, without uttering a single word left the room.

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Once a certain disciple of Santadasji Maharaj had written to him relating how, during a recent incident, Maharajji had appeared. The writer of this letter then asked him whether he (Mahrajji) knew it. Replying to this question Maharajji wrote back: "the Guru, you should know, has two aspects: one, human, the other, divine. In his human aspect, he may, through inadvertence, be unaware of something which, in his divine aspect, he fully knows. Nevertheless, to understand the secret of this mystery is difficult.

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What you have seen is the consummation of Vision (of the Divine) with the physical eye. The final vision, on the other hand, is not visual experience of any kind; it is Self-realization or Self-

knowledge (Atmajñāna), the attainment of which leads to final release from bondage (parama-mokṣa).

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He, whose mind has become such that patience is never lost and who no longer feels ill-will towards the actions of others can be said to have a mind that has become pure, and it is only such a person who is capable of attaining real peace. Indeed, a person whose mind has thus become free from malice towards all, who is not mentally disturbed by finding fault with the actions of others is really capable of retiring into solitude and practicing bhajana through meditation. He, who has not become free from rancor towards any person or any action is not really fit to take to the life of solitude and steadfast, one-pointed bhajana.

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However, you should always remember that this world (saṃsāra) is only a playground. Its joys and sorrows, scarcity and plenty – all these are transitory, external things; they have no place in your Self (Ātmā). When they appear, you become mentally identified with them and regard yourself as happy, unhappy, a loser or a winner; but when these states of joy and sorrow, gain or loss are over, they appear to you like dreams. When the state of illness is passed and one becomes fit, afterwards, if the memory of that state of illness arises in your mind. It does not cause any pain, but seems like a dream. You should always try to realize that you really are all the time above these states.

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This Universe of ours, peopled by innumerable jīvas – is all Brahman; He is inifinitely powerful; by virue of this infinite power He has assumed this Cosmic Form (viśva-rūpa) filled with an infinite number of jīvas. You, I or anybody else – none of us is separate from Him; it is He who is playing in these various forms. Know this to be the quintessential truth. The Śruti itself and the ṛṣis who had realized Brahman have declared it in one voice. Regarding this Truth you should not entertain the slightest doubt; strive constantly to realize it. In this effort, all the ṛṣis will come to your aid.